

The Advantages of Treaty

6 December 2014



Bobby Nicholls, Gene Roberts and Janet Turpie-Johnson

On 6 December 2014, 'concerned Australians' invited a group of some 50 colleagues and friends to join them for a discussion on Treaties.

Three of the attendees graciously agreed to share their views on the advantages of treaty. They were Bobby Nicholls, Aboriginal Partnership Officer at the Department of Health in Wangaratta and Co-Chair of the Traditional Elders Owners Land Justice Group, Gene Roberts who is now the Western Metropolitan Local Justice Worker for VALS, and Janet Turpie-Johnstone. Melbourne's first Aboriginal Anglican priest, and currently working as an Aboriginal Equity Pathways Officer at the Australian Catholic University.

All three were enthusiastic in their belief that treaties would improve the lives of Aboriginal peoples across Australia and their establishment would be the only way by which Aboriginal culture could be protected. Janet feared that without treaties Aboriginal culture might not survive.

Bobby was especially concerned about the disempowerment of Aboriginal peoples. He believes that treaties are important and that through them Aboriginal controlled health and education services would provide the best outcomes for his people. True Aboriginal representation is another of his concerns that would be resolved through the establishment of treaties rather than the current situation where government hand-picks the 'representatives' with whom they wish to work.

Gene Roberts spoke passionately of his commitment to treaties. He first provided an historical background reminding his audience of the brutal years of early settlement and pointing out that it is 226 years that Aboriginal people have been waiting for a treaty. He compared this situation to that of New Zealand, Canada and the United States of America where treaties are well established.

Gene believes treaties are the only way to secure self – determination. Treaties provide to the People the right to make decisions regarding their futures irrespective of which government might hold power in Canberra.

There is little doubt that our friends firmly believe that the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples of Australia would be greatly improved by the introduction of treaties while justice would be 'seen to be done'. Most importantly, Aboriginal people would gain the right to control their own lives and make decisions about their futures.

This article cannot do justice to the breadth of the discussion or the comment made during it. However the two-hour event was recorded by a generous volunteer and once we have the audio recording we will add a link to the website.

We wish to thank all those who volunteered help and especially Ian Yule who took copious notes and Barbara Oehring who took some great photos. Of course, our very special thanks goes to Janet, Gene and Bobby who were willing to share with us their views on the importance of treaties.