

## **SECTION 2: De-Bunking Myths and Assumptions**

SWAN aims to support our local First Nations organisations and their members as they seek Truth-Telling. Dan Turnbull, CEO of the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation and Peter Aldenhoven, Executive Officer of the Willum Warrain Aboriginal Association Gathering Place, Hastings have endorsed the engagement of SWAN in Truth-Telling. Deb Mellett, Manager of the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council Warringinee Team and former Chairperson of Nairn Marr Djambana Aboriginal Association Gathering Place, Frankston, continues to welcome SWAN's active support in helping to address social justice concerns identified by local First Nations communities. Injustices are of both the past and present. Aunty Carolyn Briggs, Boon Wurrung Elder, recently called on local communities to 'unpack' the truth of past policies like assimilation and their ongoing destructive impact on family and cultural connection. On January 26<sup>th</sup> this year, Australians celebrated the day that arguably began the dispossession of First Nations people from their land without compensation or treaty. First Nations people challenge us to consider the truth of why the date of 'Australia Day' should be changed. The following are some common misconceptions:

### ***THERE WEREN'T MANY FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE KILLED WHEN AUSTRALIA WAS COLONISED BY BRITAIN. THE LAND WAS BASICALLY EMPTY***

The truth is that British settlers claimed the land of Australia was 'terra nullius' (land belonging to no one) but this has been proven to be untrue. First Nations people had been living and practising culture in Australia for more than 65,000 years; there were over 500 different Aboriginal nations and 700 language groups. When British representatives began to occupy Australia, First Nations people resisted. The Frontier Wars were fought between 1788 and the 1920s. Recent estimates suggest that around 60,000 First Nations people were killed during this time in Queensland alone. From 1802 on the Mornington Peninsula, the Boon Wurrung were fired on by British military and lawless settlers, whalers and sealers near Sullivans Bay (Eidelson, 2014a, p.126).

### ***FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE HAVE BEEN COMPENSATED BY LAND RIGHTS***

The truth is that land rights are always under threat and often give way to development and mining interests. Native Title can be easily extinguished and the almost impossible barriers to making land rights claims have resulted in precious few succeeding.

### ***ABORIGINAL CHILDREN WERE TAKEN AWAY FOR THEIR OWN GOOD***

The truth is that taking children was part of a program aimed at assimilation. Children were also taken to work for non-Indigenous settlers as slaves or unpaid servants. Inter-generational trauma has resulted.

### ***OUR BACKYARDS COULD BE TAKEN BY NATIVE TITLE RIGHTS***

The truth is that Native Title only applies to Crown Land, not private property.

***ABORIGINAL PEOPLE GET SPECIAL TREATMENT***

The truth is that government funding is often not effective in reaching First Nations people. Individuals do not get extra funding compared to non-Indigenous Australians. However, programs get greater funding levels because First Nations people are so economically disadvantaged. In addition, First Nations people in remote communities are disadvantaged by the high costs of food and services, the former often resulting to poor diet.

***WE HAVE ALREADY SAID SORRY***

The truth is that Prime Minister Rudd apologised to the Stolen Generation only, and not for all the injustices since colonisation.

***IT WAS A LONG TIME AGO AND NOTHING TO DO WITH ME***

We exist on land taken illegally from First Nations and we benefit from all the associated privileges.

***GIVING FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE SPECIAL TREATMENT REMOVES THEIR INITIATIVE TO IMPROVE THEIR OWN HEALTH AND ECONOMIC SITUATION***

The truth is that intergenerational trauma caused by colonisation and current systemic barriers often deprive First Nations people of the right to act on their own behalf.

**REFERENCES / RESOURCES**

- <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/alcohol/alcohol-throughout-life/alcohol-and-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples>
- <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/2012-face-facts-chapter-1#:~:text=top%20%7C%20contents-,1.6%20Do%20Aboriginal%20and%20Torres%20Strait%20Islander%20peoples%20get%20special,benefits%20as%20non%2DIndigenous%20people>
- <http://www.shareourpride.org.au/sections/beyond-the-myths/index.html>
- Eidelson, M. 2014a, *Melbourne Dreaming: A Guide to Important Places of the Past and Present*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, ACT.
- Reynolds, H. 2021, *Truth-Telling: History, Sovereignty and the Uluru Statement*, NewSouth Publishing, Sydney, NSW.

If you have any questions or helpful ideas, please contact **SWAN Supporting First Nations Group** via [swanwomen@outlook.com](mailto:swanwomen@outlook.com). Your feedback and input is welcomed and encouraged.