

Women for Wik

A member group of ANTaR (Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation National Coalition)
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Women for Wik is a national grassroots movement which began in May 1997 when four women sat around a table to discuss ways of expressing their support for Native Title and reconciliation. This eventuated in the first Women for Wik meeting in July when Lois O'Donoghue, Marlene Riley and Jean Carter spoke movingly about the pain of their stolen childhoods to a packed hall of women representing churches, business, the arts, indigenous organisations, all levels of government, legal and medical professions, universities and Australian women generally. These included Faith Bandler, Carolyn Jones, Rachel Ward, Jane Champion, Wendy Harmer, and many others.

The success of this meeting has generated a wave of similar gatherings across Australia in every city and many regional centres, a movement which is still gathering momentum and involves the active commitment of tens of thousands of Australian women including Hazel Hawke, Ruth Cracknell, Judy Davis, Jennie George and Margaret Whitlam.

This extraordinary groundswell of support has taken everyone by surprise including the Coalition Government. It has been very heartening to see such a massive commitment by mainstream Australian women, and increasingly, as we link with rural communities, the courage of women willing to talk over these issues. Lady Deane was being prophetic when she said at the Reconciliation Conference that it is up to the women of Australia to set our country back on the path to reconciliation.

This commitment to reconciliation can be summarised in the following Six Steps formulated by the National Indigenous Working Group and Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation which Women for Wik endorse,

1. Abide by the High Court's Mabo and Wik decisions. Eject all discriminatory aspects of the Government's native title amendments and start genuine negotiations with all the parties.

2. Confirm all valid property rights. Guarantee pastoralists' existing rights and give full protection to native title rights.

3. Respect Indigenous cultural and spiritual attachment to the traditional lands. Provide Indigenous access to native title land by reasonable and proper arrangement.

4. Establish a system for negotiating binding agreements. Aboriginal people, pastoralists, miners, governments and other stakeholders need to be able to negotiate agreements about land use, a system which is expeditious, fully supported by governments and under which agreements are backed up by statute.

5. Address the genuine problems with the existing Native Title act in a constructive and non-discriminatory way. Modest changes are required to improve the native title claims process.

6. Fully support the reconciliation process. Reconciliation is the matrix for co-existence in Australia.

We believe that Native Title as endorsed by the High Court Wik decision is a basic human right crucial to the well-being of Indigenous people and their culture as well as to a truly democratic society for all Australians.

We recognise that though we of this generation cannot bring the stolen children home, we can take some responsibility for ensuring justice is done at this crucial time in Australian history. We can do this by urging the Howard government to apologise for these past wrongs as a necessary step towards reconciliation., and by opposing the effective extinguishment of Native Title by the Wik 10 point plan as unnecessary, divisive, unworkable and unjust.

We ask your organisation to endorse these Six Steps as a clear message to the Government that a significant and growing proportion of Australian women voters strongly support reconciliation.

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