



From:  
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**Submission to "Hands On Parliament"- Inquiry into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's Participation in Queensland's Democratic Process**

One reason for indigenous people choosing not to be involved in the workings of Parliament and in Government, is that they do not feel part of the system. They feel they are regarded as second-class citizens.

Unfortunately, even when white people think they are being even-handed and generous to indigenous people, their attitudes may be affected by a white ethnocentrism. Most white people are unaware of the conditioning process through which they come to accept as true, basic erroneous ideas about indigenous people.

There exists in Australia, a cultural stereotype of the Aborigine. It began with the cultural lie at the beginning of European settlement, that Aboriginal people were a "dying race". The stereotype of the lazy, hopeless, violent drunk whose culture is dying out, is unfortunately shared by a percentage of Aboriginal people themselves. As a reaction to the stresses of daily life, some Aboriginal people will adopt the stereotype, and become the hopeless drunks that they are supposed to be.

Strange as it may seem, when an Aboriginal person gives in and becomes the hopeless case that is expected of him, he experiences a lessening of tension. He doesn't need to try any more. He becomes what he is expected to be. He is not at odds with the majority cultural view.

In fact, traditionally trained Australian Aboriginal people are highly adaptable, very perceptive, and highly skilled in interpersonal psychology. They make excellent negotiators.

There is a reason why Australian Aboriginal people may be affected by racist attitudes which may not be noticed by a majority of white people. The traditional education of indigenous people involves training the senses. A fully educated Aboriginal person will be more perceptive. White education often involves making people more assertive and less perceptive. Traditional Aboriginal education makes people better listeners. White education may make people better talkers, without being better listeners.

### **Better Civics Education**

The answer to the negative false indigenous stereotype is better civics education.

Over 40,000 years, the indigenous people of Australia developed a sensible system of management of people and the land, and an advanced spiritual awareness.

The Aboriginal method of making decisions is very effective, does not leave an embittered minority who feel their opinions were not taken into consideration, and is actually the method which functioning committees use with great effect.

In the traditional Aboriginal decision-making process, everyone has an equal say, and that person speaks for himself and nobody else. The meeting is usually held in a circle. Opinions are expressed, with each person having his or her say,

with everyone else listening. Then an elder will sum up. If there is not unanimous agreement, there is another round of discussion, followed up by a summation by an elder. This process is repeated until everybody agrees on what action to take.

Civics education should teach children and adults more about the interpersonal processes that indigenous people developed successfully over thousands of years. In turn, indigenous people would have more respect for a system that respects them.

Indigenous people would be more involved in using the democratic process if the white majority were better educated about some of the really useful methods that indigenous people learned and modified over thousands of years.

#### **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Assembly or representative bodies**

There is no need for representative bodies to be established for the purpose of representing indigenous people in the Queensland Parliament, and there is no need for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Assembly.

An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Assembly would be a very bad idea. It would give the impression that indigenous people are somehow inferior. There is nothing wrong with our parliamentary system, provided people learn to treat the system and each other with respect.

#### **Dedicated Parliamentary Seats**

The provision of dedicated seats would enhance the participation of indigenous people in the democratic process. There should be five (5) seats.

The indigenous representatives should be selected, rather than being elected. They should be selected by a process of indigenous community discussions after

nomination by elders. This process should be funded by the Electoral Commission. It may or may not take longer than the usual process of parliamentary pre-selection and voting. However, it will ensure that indigenous people are involved in the democratic process.

People who identify themselves as indigenous, could indicate whether they want to vote in the State election for the person standing for the electoral seat in which they live, or be involved in the process of selecting an indigenous candidate through the traditional selection process. They cannot be allowed to do both.

Indigenous people would of course vote in the Federal election as normal.

There should not be a referendum to make this decision, because the overall numerical majority of Queensland citizens know little about indigenous people. They are not well enough informed about indigenous culture to be able to make a sensible decision. Our parliamentarians are elected to make such decisions.

The selection by traditional means of five dedicated seats would satisfy the goal of making indigenous people more involved in the democratic process.

Each of the selected five indigenous representatives should have the same rights and responsibilities as other members of parliament. They should be free to vote in the parliament individually as independents.

It is not necessary to change our electoral system to cater for minority groups in general. Our parliamentary system is quite efficient, providing that we treat the system and each other with respect.

Indigenous Queenslanders have a unique claim for minority representation. This claim is based on prior ownership of the land, and the unique culture of indigenous Australians. The claim of indigenous Australians to the right to

minority representation is not some generic concept that applies to minorities in general.

**Other strategies to enhance participation of indigenous people in the democratic process**

Each member of the Queensland Parliament should, if his/her electorate has a significant indigenous population, have regular meetings with a group of elders representing the indigenous community.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Paddy Jerome', is written over a horizontal dashed line.