



One of the fundamental principles the Committee for Perth is committed to is acknowledging and respecting Perth's Indigenous people and their culture and history. As part of that commitment, we're strong supporters of establishing a World Centre for Indigenous Culture at Elizabeth Quay that will provide a platform for reconciliation along with showcasing and celebrating Indigenous culture both at home and across the world.

Last year's [Towards a Bright Future](#) report also supported this position. Recommendation 6 stated that we should:

6: Acknowledge and respect Indigenous culture and history

Establish Perth as the Australian region that truly acknowledges, respects and celebrates Indigenous people, history and culture (with the establishment of an Indigenous Cultural Centre as a first priority).

Food for thought on reconciliation

In order to encourage the implementation of this recommendation, the Committee recently invited long-time Indigenous advocate the Hon. Fred Chaney AO and Glen Kelly, CEO of the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council to address our Food for Thought luncheon about the issue of reconciliation.

They both firmly believe that our reconciliation journey has come a long way and that it still has even further to go but they're optimistic about the future.

Glen, who has been involved in two Native Title litigations, believes there is now a better understanding by the State Government that if it was to ultimately win the Native Title court cases, they would ultimately lose, because the law would have ruled that the Noongar people would be forever dispossessed.

He said that this level of legally sanctioned alienation would do exactly the opposite of Closing the Gap; it would lead to lower levels of Indigenous education, worse health outcomes and higher levels of crime.

Thankfully, Glen said the State Government recently told the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council that they would prefer to resolve Native Title issues out of court. He described this as an important gesture towards reconciliation, inclusivity and harmony.

While he admitted that the personal cost for the Noongar people of surrendering their Native Title rights to hunt, fish, camp and hold traditional ceremonies was very high the benefits could be transformational.

Citing the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act as best practice, the Natives received up to 180,000 km² of land and \$963 million for surrendering their Native Title rights. The land and money were divided among regional, urban, and village tribal corporations. More than forty years later, a number of these corporations are multinational players.

He believes that if a similar deal were to happen here, it would give Noongar people the ability to excel and prosper by gaining higher education levels, better health outcomes and as he described it, be "normal" members of society.

Despite being one of Australia's longest campaigners for Indigenous equality and reconciliation, Fred Chaney has lost none of his determination for change. He reminded the Food for Thought audience that reconciliation Indigenous equality is not a race for sprinters, it's a marathon.

Mr Chaney said he never dreamt of a day when there were seven Indigenous postgraduate students at Oxford University, 170 Aboriginal doctors and a PM who will live one day a year in an Aboriginal settlement.

He did, though, highlight that we still had one of the highest Indigenous incarceration rates in the world. Mr Chaney also added that the most important changes in Indigenous equality were driven by Aboriginal people themselves and that once we started to see more intergenerational improvements in education, health and employment then the investment in pushing for change was worth it.

Mr Chaney left the audience to think about this: "You're not going to regret your efforts towards reconciliation. On your deathbed you won't be saying, I'm bloody sorry I wasted my time on that. You'll be saying I know that one of the good things I've done was to change this aspect of Australia that was a blot on us as a country, our inability to find a proper respectful relationship between us and the first Australians."

The Committee for Perth launched our [2014-2015 Reconciliation Action Plan](#) at our end of year celebration in December.

This article was submitted by SKM and was originally published in Committee for Perth Insight e-newsletter, January 2014, 'Towards a Bright Future' column. We believe initiatives like this will help realise our bright future vision for Perth. Copies of the plan can be obtained from Emmerson Richardson at SKM - erichardson@globalskm.com