

26th January 2015

White sails on the harbour marked the arrival of English settlers but not the birth of human society that has existed here for longer than anyone really knows.

Invasion Day, Survival Day, Australia Day, whatever you choose to call this day it does not yet reveal who we are as a nation, who we truly are as diverse people from so many places.

Yes this day should allow us to focus on our strengths as a nation, our peacefulness, overall unity and extraordinary diversity. However, we are yet to reach the political maturity that will allow us to celebrate the unique foundations of this cultural diversity, the longer timelines of history.

The diversity of languages and cultures among First Peoples is the basis of the most hopeful society on earth.

To reach political maturity we must recognise the disempowerment, discrimination and deep disadvantage that is all part of our poverty within, part of who we are today.

We must wake up to see that while we are celebrating the health and happiness of the majority of Australians we are standing by and allowing the dispossession of hundreds of whole communities, thousands of our fellow citizens who are to be swept off the homelands.

The Barnett Government in WA and the Weatherill Government in SA are following the lead of the NT Government in slowly strangling the homelands. 150 in WA and over 50 in SA in the APY Lands are now on the endangered list. I say to my fellow Australians on 'Australia Day', would you allow this to happen to your family, to your community?

It is a grim irony that there is now a poisonous bipartisanship in the determination of the Coalition and ALP politicians, state and federal to drive people off country and into the so called growth towns.

There is not adequate housing, education, healthcare or employment in these towns for the homelands people and so Australia appears to be consigning people to the long grass and the already overcrowded town camps.

I want Australians to see on this Australia Day that this disastrous approach is going to accelerate homelessness, crime, unnecessary incarceration as well as self-harm and suicide. My pledge on Australia Day is to stand with people who are being told you may be the First Australians but right now you are nobody, you are invisible, and despite all of the talk your true rights are ignored.

2015 is the year in which Australia will celebrate the ANZAC centenary. But can we also try to remember the dispossession story, the relentless war here at home on people, land and culture. This too is part of who we are as a nation.

The current legislative changes to the Land Rights ACT, the marginalising of Land Councils and Traditional Owners, is shifting control to the new corporations who with the nod of a federal minister will become the new Chief Protectors, pretending to care about the people but truly only interested in the wealth of these lands. These changes will materialise this year unless Australians stand up and speak out against this threat.

Jeff McMullen comments in Redfern and Canberra, January 26th 2015.