

Together we honour
the Indigenous peoples of this land,
the oldest continuing cultures in human history.

There is nothing to fear
or to lose,
in the recognition of historical truth,
or in the extension of social justice,
or the deepening of Australian social democracy
to include indigenous Australians.

There is everything to gain!

Mabo established a fundamental truth
and laid the basis for justice.
—we should make it an historic turning point,
the basis of a new relationship
between indigenous and non-Aboriginal Australians.

The starting point,
is an act of recognition,
that “the problem” starts with us
non-Aboriginal Australians.

Recognition that:-

It was we who did the dispossessing.

We took the traditional lands
and smashed the traditional way of life.

It was we who did the dispossessing.

We brought the disasters.
The alcohol.
We committed the murders.

It was we who did the dispossessing.

We took the children from their mothers.
We practised discrimination and exclusion.

It was we who did the dispossessing.

It was our ignorance and our prejudice.
And our failure to imagine these things being done to us.

With some noble exceptions,
we failed to make the most basic human response
and enter into their hearts and minds.
We failed to ask—how would I feel if this were done to me?

As a consequence,
we failed to see
that what we were doing
degraded all of us.

[silent pause for reflection]

Perhaps when we recognise what we have in common
we will see the things which must be done.

What we need to do is open our hearts a bit....
All of us.

It might help us,
if we non-Aboriginal Australians

imagined ourselves
dispossessed of land
we have lived on for 50 000 years
—and then imagined ourselves told
that it had never been ours.

[- brief pause]

Imagine if ours was the oldest culture in the world
and we were told that it was worthless.

[- brief pause]

Imagine if we had resisted this settlement,
suffered and died in the defence of our land,
and then were told in history books
that we had given up without a fight.

[- brief pause]

Imagine if non-Aboriginal Australians
had served their country in peace and war
and were then ignored in history books.

[- brief pause]

Imagine if our feats on sporting fields
had inspired admiration and patriotism
and yet did nothing to diminish prejudice.

[- brief pause]

Imagine if our spiritual life
was denied and ridiculed.

[- brief pause]

Imagine if we had suffered the injustice
and then were blamed for it.

[- brief pause]

So, if we can imagine the injustice
then we can imagine its opposite.

And we can have justice.

We reflect in particular
on the mistreatment
of those who were Stolen Generations
—this blemished chapter in our nation’s history.

[- brief pause]

For the laws and policies
of successive Parliaments and governments
that have inflicted profound grief,
suffering and loss
on these our fellow Australians:

We apologise!

For the removal
of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
from their families,
their communities
and their country:

We apologise!

For the pain, suffering and hurt
of these Stolen Generations,

their descendants
and for their families left behind:

We say sorry!

To the mothers
and to the fathers,
the brothers
and the sisters,
for the breaking up of families and communities:

We say sorry!

And for the indignity
and degradation
thus inflicted
on a proud people
and a proud culture:

We say sorry!

Surely just solutions can be found
to the problems which beset the first Australians
—the people to whom
the most injustice has been done.

For the future we take heart:

resolving that this new page
in the history of our great continent
can now be written.

We, today, take this first step

by acknowledging the past
and laying claim to a future
that embraces all Australians.

A future, where we resolve
that the injustices of the past
must never, never happen again.

A future where we harness
the determination of all Australians,
Indigenous and non-Indigenous,
to close the gap that lies between us
in life expectancy,
educational achievement
and economic opportunity.

A future, where we embrace the possibility
of new solutions to enduring problems
where old approaches have failed.

A future based on mutual respect,
mutual resolve
and mutual responsibility.

A future where all Australians,
whatever their origins,
are truly equal partners,
with equal opportunities
and with an equal stake
in shaping the next chapter
in the history of this great country, Australia.