

11 April 2016



## **Wayside Board Member calls for constitutional recognition of Aboriginal peoples**

Wayside Board Member and senior QC, Bob Ellicott, is calling for constitutional recognition of Indigenous peoples in Australia.

Mr Ellicott is a distinguished lawyer, politician and judge. He has extensive experience with constitutional law, and is one of only six politicians to have served in both the Parliament of Australia and the Federal Court of Australia. He is now turning his attention to Aboriginal inequalities in Australia and campaigning for Aboriginal recognition.

In an extensive legal document, Mr Ellicott calls for constitutional change which recognises the unique status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and acknowledges that they have been discriminated against throughout our history. His proposed changes:

- *Recognise* that the continent and its islands now known as Australia were first occupied by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
- *Acknowledges* the continuing relationship of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with their traditional lands and waters;
- *Respects* the continuing cultures, languages and heritage of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
- *Acknowledges* that their languages are the original Australian languages and are part of Australia's national heritage.

The changes also recognise:

- The unique status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples;
- That they share the same rights and obligations before the law as other Australians;
- That they have been discriminated against and that the Commonwealth, a State or a Territory should not discriminate in respect of them except for the purposes of overcoming disadvantage ameliorating the effects of past discrimination or protection of their cultures, languages or heritage.

*"When any race has been violated to the point of near annihilation and almost complete dispossession it will remain in their collective memory a long time as it does. This needs to be addressed in considering constitutional recognition. Acts of acceptance, reconciliation and empowerment will need to be involved."* Bob Ellicott, QC

*"Much has happened since 1900. The 1966 Referendum and other measures aimed at lifting their standard of living have been adopted. Aboriginal leader, Stan Grant says "We have come a long way". Their relationship with the land has clearly been recognised and embodied in legislation. There are many who have had or are studying for a tertiary education, have professional qualifications or are involved or employed in business or the public service. Strong and capable leaders have emerged, but, in various forms, discrimination has continued, efforts to improve health have in remoter areas been disappointing and programs to eradicate substance abuse have largely failed. The numbers imprisoned is far too high and there seems to be no solution in sight. There is much to be done and the indigenous people need to be involved in the doing of it. Most matters involved in constitutional recognition are matters of fact or are accepted as basic elements of the free society ours is supposed to be."* Bob Ellicott, QC

*"This is the end of dependency and the beginning of empowerment... our indigenous people should be allowed to stand on their own feet managing their own affairs and being involved in the formulation, adoption and implementation of the policies and programs. It is surely time for these views to be encouraged, adopted and implemented by government. To achieve this, indigenous people need to be empowered to do so. Involvement, management and empowerment are therefore at the heart of recognition."* Bob Ellicott, QC

Bob Ellicott has been a Board Member of The Wayside Chapel for more than 40 years, and Wayside has a long history of advocating for Aboriginal affairs. In 2014, Australian of the Year Adam Goodes joined forces with Senior Australian of the

Year and human rights advocate, Fred Chaney and 2014 NSW Local Hero and Wayside Chapel's CEO, Rev Graham Long to highlight the importance of Aboriginal constitutional recognition. Wayside held an event in May 2014 which brought together Goodes, Chaney and Long with many from the Aboriginal and wider community to urge all Australians to unite for recognition and continue crucial work to close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage. The Wayside Chapel takes seriously its position in the Aboriginal community and its obligation and opportunity to advocate for Aboriginal rights.

**For further media information, contact Eimear Elkington, Wayside's Marketing and Communications Coordinator, on 0497 841 716 or email [eimear.elkington@thewaysidechapel.com](mailto:eimear.elkington@thewaysidechapel.com).**

*About The Wayside Chapel*

*The Wayside Chapel has provided unconditional love, care and support for people on and around the streets of Kings Cross since 1964. Today, under the banner of 'Love over Hate', Wayside runs a community services centre, youth space and outreach service, mental health program, community café, and Aboriginal project. All programs are designed to ensure that the most marginalised members of our community have access to essential health, welfare, social and recreational services, as well as a judgment-free place where people are welcome just to 'be'.*