

## From Rhetoric to Reconciliation: Addressing the Challenge of Equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Criminal Justice Processes

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I would like to begin by acknowledging the Kaurna peoples, the traditional owners and custodians of the land where we are gathered today, and pay my respects to their elders and to the ancestors. It is good to see so many familiar faces here tonight and hello to all of the Nungas in the audience.

Thank you Flinders University for inviting me to deliver this significant address. And thank you to Gary Davis, Tracey Bunda and staff for making the arrangements.

May I begin by stating that it is an honour to deliver this lecture.

Elliott Johnston has made a significant contribution to the pursuit of justice and equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

He has done this most famously, but not exclusively, through his role as National Commissioner on the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

The processes and final reports of that Royal Commission represent a pivotal moment in the history of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations in this country.

The reports smashed the so-called 'great Australian silence', by making explicit the connections between the *history* of treatment of Indigenous peoples and its *ongoing, contemporary impact*. This is seen through the continuing experiences of disadvantage and discrimination, and most tragically through the deaths in custody of too many Indigenous people.

The final recommendation of the Royal Commission's report also introduced into our national debates the concept of 'reconciliation'.

Up front, I want to acknowledge that Elliott Johnston's contribution is broader than just being a champion for justice and equality for Indigenous peoples. It is also a significant contribution to public life in Australia.

He has challenged governments and all Australians to strive for a fairer and better future. One in which all Australians – Indigenous *and* non-Indigenous

\* This lecture was delivered in 2006. It was published in (2006) 9 *Flinders Journal of Law Reform* 113.

This is a preview. Not all pages are shown.