

## Engagement to Support Indigenous Self-Determination

*Eddie Cubillo\**

The Nine Most Terrifying Words in the English Language are:  
‘I’m From the Government and I’m Here to Help’<sup>1</sup>

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the Traditional Owners, the Kaurna people, on the land that we meet today.

It was not that long ago that I completed my Masters of International Law and International Relations at Flinders University. I remember coming to classes on weekends and wondering what I was doing in such a freezing place on a Saturday and Sunday. In particular, the mornings at Flinders Campus in winter are pretty chilly. How I longed for the hot humid weather of Darwin, where shorts and thongs is the common dress code.

I am honoured to be asked to speak at such an event especially with past speakers of the ilk of Father Frank Brennan, Magistrate Pat O’Shane, Professor Marcia Langton, Jacqui Katona, Professor Larissa Behrendt, Dr Irene Watson, Ms Linda Burney MP and Tom Calma just to name a few.

And, as a proud Aboriginal man, I also am honoured to acknowledge the former Royal Commissioner into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, the Hon Elliott Johnston AO QC, and to present this tribute lecture.

### Introduction

My talk will focus on engagement and how ‘real respectful engagement’ is essential to support Indigenous self-determination. I will look at engagement with a particular focus on the Northern Territory Emergency Response. I will draw on the historical attempts by Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory to get their voices heard. I will also discuss the Report into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and the impact of the abolition of ATSIC, and the Federal Government’s Intervention – on the concept and reality of engagement.

A theme throughout this discussion will be the need to appreciate and provide for real and respectful participation for the members of our First Nations about matters that impinge on our wellbeing and capacity for self-determination.

\* This lecture was delivered in 2011. It was published in (2011) 13 *Flinders Law Journal* 137.  
1 Ronald Regan, *Remarks to Representatives of the Future Farmers of America* 28 July 1988 <[www.regan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1988/072888c.htm](http://www.regan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1988/072888c.htm)>.

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