

INTRODUCTION

This is an exciting and diverse general edition of the *Journal of Indigenous Policy*. Like most of our general editions, Issue 13 reflects dynamic voices and thoughtful commentary on issues within Indigenous policy realms. The contributors speak to broader policy contexts as well as more specific topics of high importance for our communities.

Christina Son traverses complex water reform issues, noting key barriers to effective engagement and highlighting potential models for greater Indigenous community outcomes. She argues that Indigenous peoples must enjoy the same opportunities and stakeholder engagement as all other parties to continuing reform measures.

Jeff McMullen eloquently searches for common ground in this reprinted speech. He clearly places enduring relationships at the centre of the debate ‘I ask you tonight, is this the time to close the space between us?’ If Australian law has been blind to Indigenous rights then how do we bring light to a failing system, how do we bring action to continuing failure of word upon words? How can justice emerge in a nation that enacts a *Northern Territory Emergency Response Act* ‘that is still an unlawful act, an unjust act of war against Aboriginal culture’? This is a must read article and powerful discussion on the implications of constitutional recognition and breaking the silence of injustice in Australia.

Justine Curatolo takes us on a critical and insightful journey through the human rights matrix and international Indigenous contexts. She explores various jurisdictions and offers a hopeful perspective on the potential for Indigenous rights recognition through international mechanisms and norms such as the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Cosima Hay McRae illuminates the ramifications of the suspension of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth) (the ‘RDA’) under the Northern Territory Intervention legislation. She provides some deep analysis of the political and historical context for the suspension while also highlighting some of the broad reaching criticisms of the special measures justification offered by successive Australian governments. McRae argues strongly that the suspension of the RDA is a clear contravention of Australia’s international obligations, allowing us to reflect on the deeper implications of human rights protection in Australia.

Jill Webb traces the development of self-determination and elaborates on the application of this principle for Indigenous peoples. Through some clever analysis she notes how Australian policy has interpreted and misinterpreted the right to self-determination. She strongly argues that Indigenous peoples cannot exercise true self-determination ‘without effective jurisdiction or sovereign

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control over substantive decision-making'. Indeed Indigenous self-determination can only be defined by our own peoples, through our own processes and in our own ways.

In the final presentation Jilpia Nappaljari Jones shares insights into the historical and social aspects of Aboriginal birthing on country. She argues that 'evacuation of an Aboriginal to a city hospital for delivery has produced not only social disruption in her family and community, but also has the effect of prolonging her labour because of the fear engendered through removal to a foreign environment'. She concludes with strong practical recommendations for ensuring the best for Aboriginal mothers and families.

We hope you enjoy this long awaited edition of the *Journal of Indigenous Policy*.

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