



NEWSLETTER #40, October 2009

AGM

The 2009 Annual General Meeting of the Nillumbik Reconciliation Group Inc will be held on Thursday 12th November, 2009, at 7pm at the *Gathering Space*, Our Lady's Church, 4 Henry Street, Eltham.

The purpose of the meeting will be to receive the annual report from the President and the financial statement for 2008-9 from the Treasurer.

All Committee positions will be declared vacant and new office bearers will be elected. Nomination forms are available from the Secretary Diana Warrell 9439 8565 or from the website. They must be returned by 5pm on Monday 9 November.

The guest speaker for the occasion is Elizabeth Savage Kooroonya, a founding member of the group and our cultural adviser.

As the football season draws to a close it seemed appropriate to reprint this article from a few years ago – Michael Long's stand against racism and his fight for his people are a lesson in the true meaning of leadership.

An accidental leader Waleed Aly, *The Age*, June 10, 2006

ANZAC Day 1995 is remembered as the birthdate of one of modern football's greatest traditions. More than 94,000 packed the MCG to watch Essendon and Collingwood stage an epic, pulsating, high-scoring draw. The two clubs have owned the fixture ever since. At the final siren, football history was made.

But social history had been in the making for roughly 3½ minutes. The ball was on centre-wing. Collingwood ruckman Damian Monkhorst fell upon it and was tackled by two Aboriginal players: Michael Long and Che Cockatoo-Collins. Long later reported that as they were entangled on the ground, Monkhorst turned to him and said: "Get off me, you little black bastard." Long had sanitised the story out of public politeness. Monkhorst had really used a far nastier term beginning with "c".

The umpire was within earshot. Long and Cockatoo-Collins immediately appealed to him. They were ignored. The ball was bounced. Play continued. At game's end, Long headed off the ground and straight to Essendon official Danny Corcoran. If the racial abuse was not sufficiently hideous, the blind eye of the umpire, and Monkhorst's consequent unaccountability, was. Long wanted to make an official complaint.

Racism in football has a long history. Baldwin Spencer, VFL president from 1919 to 1926, considered the Aborigine "a very curious mixture: mentally, about the level of a child who has little control over his feelings and is liable to give way to violent fits of temper. He has no sense of responsibility and, except in rare cases, no initiative."

Only 18 Aborigines played in the VFL from 1906 to 1980. Considering the hostility of the environment, this is hardly surprising. In the late 1920s, Carlton rejected Doug Nicholls as a player because he was black and "smelt". The racism from both sides of the fence drove Michael McLean, who once played more games than any other Aborigine, to contemplate quitting. He pointed out that Aboriginal superstars such as Maurice Rioli and the Krakouers were constantly before the tribunal for retaliating to abuse, which only earned them reputations of violence. "A lot of people don't realise what we went through. It built up to a point over the years where something simply had to be done," McLean said.

Something was done in 1993 when Collingwood hosted St Kilda at Victoria Park. The Collingwood fans were in fine racist form, hurling abuse at St Kilda's Aboriginal star, Nicky Winmar, that even made Winmar's opponent feel "uncomfortable and embarrassed". St Kilda won the match. Winmar approached the Collingwood cheer squad, lifted his jumper, pointed to his skin and said: "I'm black, and I'm proud."



Nicky Winmar pictured in 1993
Photo: Wayne Ludbey, © The Age

This powerfully symbolic gesture paved the way, but Michael Long's complaint was the first use of official AFL channels to take up the issue of on-field racism. By now, Long had come to learn that, to football-loving Aboriginal communities, he had unwittingly become a leader. His stand on racism was not just for himself but for his people.

But the backlash was firm and swift. Talkback callers accused him of over-sensitivity and questioned his manhood. He was accused of reverse racism. Former players joined in. Tony Shaw warned Long he would get "a reputation". Mal Brown could not see why racist abuse was any different to him being called fat as a player. Brown pined for the '70s, when Aborigines were taunted with "nigger, nigger pull the trigger" and "people just rose above it". Simultaneously, he claimed victimhood for white children: "There is a great fear that, with the division between us and them, our own children won't get equal opportunity."

Sam Newman argued that the insult was probably designed to do no more than distract Long, and that in any event, "Michael Long IS black". If we needed convincing how little Newman understood what was at stake, it came four years later when Nicky Winmar failed to appear as scheduled on *The Footy Show*. Newman responded by blackening his face with boot polish and mockingly impersonating Winmar.

These responses demonstrated just how little the gravity of racism had been grasped by other than its victims. Racism is what burned in the torches of the Ku Klux Klan. It informed government policies that removed children from their parents to be brought up "correctly", and denied Aborigines the vote. It still contributes to the deaths of Aboriginal babies from common flu and malnutrition, and the discrepancy in life expectancies between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. Racial vilification buys into that legacy. It is not the same as calling someone fat.

Yet Collingwood's lamentable response was to enter defensive mode. President Allan McAlister denied all evidence of Monkhorst's guilt and, presumably with a straight face, asserted "there is no racism whatsoever in Collingwood". The AFL, meanwhile, left Long and Monkhorst alone at AFL headquarters to settle their differences privately, followed by perhaps the most ridiculous news conference in sporting history: then AFL chief executive Ross Oakley sat between the players, barred them from speaking, and announced to the world that the issue was resolved.

Long was incensed. He had taken a public stand, opened himself to ridicule, then been silenced. Players could be fined \$1500 for rudeness to an umpire, but faced no sanction for racially abusing other players. The AFL had spoken tough on racism, yet delivered meek embarrassment. Long blew the whistle.

He revealed that Monkhorst had not apologised, but simply retorted: "You took it the wrong way, mate." Long intimated that the AFL wanted to "hush it up" but insisted that the public had a right to know. Long again spoke for his people. It was a courageous, powerful thing to do. The mightiest sporting body in the land had been shamed. Eventually Monkhorst apologised, two weeks after the incident. With that, the case was closed. But Long had set in motion a profoundly transformative chain of events. Aboriginal players now found the courage to speak publicly about the abuse they received on and off the field.

The initially ham-fisted AFL forged cross-cultural programs with the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association, and sought advice from Aboriginal players on how racial abuse should be handled. This yielded the identification of a hard core of six to eight footballers who routinely employed racial abuse on the field.

A code of conduct containing racial vilification provisions, which had sat dormant since the Winmar incident, suddenly came to life. Players and clubs could be heavily fined or even suspended. The code even won a United Nations award. Within a few months of the Long-Monkhorst controversy, the AFL launched anti-racism advertising campaigns and threatened to eject racist fans from finals matches.

By 1999, St Kilda ruckman Peter Everitt suspended himself for four matches for vilifying Melbourne's Scott Chisholm and donated \$20,000 to an Aboriginal charity of Chisholm's choice. He did this with undeniable sincerity: his eyes welling with tears, his voice trembling. He was profoundly sorry for hurting Chisholm, his family, and most crucially, the Aboriginal people. Such was unthinkable in the pre-Long era.

Within five years, a group of Aboriginal footballers declared publicly that racist sledging was a thing of the past in the AFL. By 2001, Long himself felt there were no longer any barriers to Aborigines playing in the AFL, and dared to hope that racial vilification would be gone from sporting fields within a generation. It is no coincidence that Aboriginal participation in the AFL has boomed since. There are now more than 50 elite Aboriginal footballers, far outstripping their proportion of the general population. There are also, and have been, countless players of countless backgrounds: Italian, Greek, Korean, Lebanese, South African, Fijian.

Long had taken us to a new place. Collingwood, once infamous for racism, has become one of Australia's most proactive football clubs in building race relations. As he neared retirement, Monkhorst would call the Long incident "the low part of my career", for which atonement would be sought through supporting Aboriginal teammates if they received similar treatment. It is highly unlikely Monkhorst would have felt such regret had Long not taken his stand. Yet even he took pride in "what it's meant for the community, not only at the AFL level but in country football as well, I might be the guy who has made people and the community aware".

On the eve of the 2001 grand final, Long suffered the great emotional pain of retirement. He coped by pursuing alternative activities, and took to painting with a mixture of glue and earth from his father's country: an expression of Long's deep connection with the land, but also his family. Perhaps this is what caused him to research his family history. Long came to know the suffering of his parents, both of whom were taken away from their own parents as infants, never to see them again.

Here, I suspect, we see the broadening of Long's horizons. The Monkhorst incident had a deeper subtext, but was primarily about racism in football. Now Long carried with him the pain of the stolen generation. With a new, broader field of vision, the time was ripe for the innate, accidental leadership Long demonstrated in 1995 to find wider expression. At a friend's funeral in November 2004, Long was appalled to notice how little the conditions of his people had changed.

As in 1995, enough was enough. He had been to too many funerals, and seen too many Aboriginal communities tearing themselves apart through violence and alcoholism. He wondered if there would be any Aboriginal people left by 2050.

Long felt that only Aboriginal people could correct this, but they needed government help. He wanted to meet the Prime Minister to get their plight back on the national agenda. He woke one morning and decided to walk from Melbourne until he reached Canberra or John Howard agreed to meet him.

Consider the unmistakable symbolic power: here was an Aboriginal man, concerned with Aboriginal problems engaged in a thoroughly Aboriginal act. Walking the country "blackfella style" to meet the Prime Minister; taking his culture to Parliament House. It oozed instinct, spontaneity and by association, sincerity. A statement of desperation, but also preparedness to undertake whatever effort was required to rectify his people — to meet a man who had never been his, or his people's friend.

Again, Long would face detractors, largely on the assumption that this was a symbolic, but practically useless gesture to secure apologies and solve nothing.

Such deeply ideological responses were misguided. Reconciliation that avoids the symbolic trivialises the pain of Aboriginal Australia's post-colonial history. It purports to wipe the slate clean, as though this were possible without first acknowledging Aboriginal humanity by acknowledging their loss. But regardless, Long was calling for more than an apology. "We need action," he said as he walked. "We can't wait. People are dying." Once more, despite the criticism, Long took the people with him. The Melbourne Plumbers Union and the Australian Workers Union donated support vehicles to the cause. The Royal Melbourne Hospital provided maps.

Hundreds of ordinary people joined in, coming from as far away as Darwin and Brisbane just to walk a few kilometres. Emails streamed in from throughout Australia, from remote Aboriginal communities, from England, France, Italy, Denmark, Switzerland, the US and China. Descendants of Molly Craig, of *Rabbit-Proof Fence* fame, asked Long to think of her as he trekked to Canberra. When told of this, Long was quick to retain perspective: "Those kids walked 2000 kilometres to get back home, to where they belonged."

Long had inspired people. He had rekindled their hope for change. Once more, he had gathered people around a very simple idea with considerable moral force. John Howard had no choice but to meet him.

Thousands of Australians that couldn't wish they could have joined Long, and told him. Now the Long Walk is an annual event. [<http://www.thelongwalk.com.au/>] The issues are back on the agenda, precisely as Long hoped. He has created his own grassroots reconciliation movement with its own momentum. This is his second great project. It is more ambitious than the first, but who would deny him?



Michael Long meets Prime Minister John Howard after his Melbourne to Canberra walk. Photo: Andrew Taylor, © SMH

"Leadership is an action, not a word," observed Richard Cooley. Michael Long is a man of few words, but clearly a man of action. "You don't lead people by following them, but by saying what they want to follow," remarked Enoch Powell. In an age where we think of leadership as reflecting, rather than inspiring, people, Long has provided a window onto the possible future. He will continue to inspire because he appeals to the best in us, proceeding from the assumption that people are essentially good.

He did this without a title, as an ordinary man who recognised when it was time to act. Long is

an accidental, even reluctant leader. A man who did not seek leadership, but whom leadership sought.

I come from a tradition where leadership is best denied to those who seek it, where a person's desire for leadership is a sign of their unfitness for it. Perhaps that is why Long is among this nation's best leaders. He has sought to unite people and build an inclusive consensus, while the trend in Canberra is to make political currency out of division. And all the while he has exuded an unconscious humility — a quality of which Canberra has long been bereft.

Is public leadership today an art? In our politics, it is more appropriately described as a game. But if it aspires to art, Long has quietly restored it. Perhaps, ironically, as only a player of games could.

Waleed Aly is a lawyer and a writer. This is an edited extract of the Daniel Mannix Memorial Lecture on the Art of Public Leadership he delivered at Melbourne University in 2006

<http://www.theage.com.au/news/in-depth/an-accidental-leader/2006/06/09/1149815316647.html>

Indigenous Health and Healing Symposium

Investing in better public policy

Free event

Speakers: Aunty Joy Wandin-Murphy AO, The Hon Jenny Macklin MP, Dr Lowitja O'Donohue, and more.

Date/Time: Monday 9 November, 2009; 4.00 - 5.30 pm lecture and discussion – catering and refreshments to follow.

Location: BMW Edge lecture theatre, Federation Square, Melbourne

Register: email mnhs.rsvp@med.monash.edu.au; phone 9905 5971

**Walk with Dean Stewart along the Yarra and hear about the Indigenous history of Melbourne:
Friday 13th November, \$15 per person. Times and meeting place to be confirmed.
Please register your interest in this event with Jan Aitken (9439 0342) or Jann Darvill (9439 7342)**

Culture to hear, to talk with, to experience ... To Share !

“Walkin’ Birrarung” ~ a Yarra River Cultural Experience

As the very first white explorers rowed their way up a log-tangled river, they found their passage blocked by a small but formidable waterfall. Unable to go further they named this river the local Aboriginal word “Yarra Yarra”.

It was not until later this same party realised they had misunderstood the local Aboriginal inhabitants, the Kulin people, and had incorrectly named the river.

*The Ancestral Kulin name is **Birrarung: the ‘River of Mists’**.*

In around ninety minutes this special walk gives patrons a sense of a small but significant portion of the ancestral lands of the Kulin people.

A place we today call Melbourne.

This experience evokes the memories of a vibrant natural, and cultural landscape. A memory that now lies beneath our urban existence today. Come and dispel some old misunderstandings for yourself and see the city with new eyes.

***Find Melbourne’s CBD waterfall, its rich wetlands, and its Aboriginal people ~
Still here and still ‘Walkin’ Birrarung’ ... Please come walk with us***

Tour details ...

This cultural experience, lead by Aboriginal Cultural Interpreters is designed with Melbournians in mind. It is a walk back through time.

Back through the place we now call the CBD of Melbourne.

It is a journey not only through the natural heritage, but equally the cultural heritage and the dramatic irrevocable changes of both people, and place.

Beginning at Enterprise Park (next to the Aquarium) the group journeys up the Yarra River - ‘Birrarung’ walking along Southbank shopping precinct and concluding at Princes Bridge and Federation Square.

(Enterprise Park start point: Melways ref: 43 G10)

A short walk, further on into Birrarung Marr Park and the new Common Ground Aboriginal public art space is an optional but very worthwhile addition to the experience.

Several stops are made along the way highlighting important Aboriginal Kulin sites, sites now trapped beneath the asphalt and the high-rise apartments of our 21st century.

At each stop photos, colonial imagery and cultural stories are revealed by your Aboriginal Cultural Interpreter ~ enriching the experience and unravelling the layers of history, and that undeniable spirit under our feet.

‘Walkin Birrarung’ is not only a cultural and history journey of understanding, but is an intimate personal one connecting everyone – regardless of age or background – back to a connection with a Spirit of Place.

NOMINATION FORM FOR NRG COMMITTEE 2009-10

All positions on the Committee are declared vacant at the AGM.

Nominations for the following positions are called for: President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer and two general committee members.

NOMINATED for the POSITION of:

PERSON NOMINATED:

I agree to stand for election for the position of:

Signed:

NOMINATED BY: Signed:

SECONDED BY: Signed:

Nominations close on Monday November 9, 2009. They must be received by the Secretary, Diana Warrell, PO Box 1017, Research 3095 by 5 pm on that day.

If more than one person nominates for a position an election will be held at the AGM. If only one nomination is received that person will be declared elected.

If no one is nominated, nominations will be received from the floor at the AGM.

Diamond Valley Oxfam and ELTHAMbookshop presents the 5th ANNUAL WORLD MATTERS: END OF CERTAINTY A CELEBRATION OF NEW QUESTIONS, OF FRESH ALTERNATIVES OCTOBER 17TH — 19TH, NOVEMBER 18TH

You can download the above brochure from the NRG website, or pick up a copy at the bookshop.
Advance bookings for sessions is advisable.

The following session is supported by Nillumbik Reconciliation Group:
Country – Belonging, Badge, Border, Stralya – Sunday 18th, 4.15 to 5.30pm
Through the lens of travel memoir, novel and essay, Howard Goldenberg (*Raft*), Bruce Pascoe (*Bloke*) and John Bradley (*Sacred Australia*) reflect on how writing across all genres is, more than ever, deeply implicated in multiple histories and social struggles.

GENERAL MEETING

The next meeting will be held at 5.30pm at the home of
Don Brown and Joan Pickard:
22 Hillcrest Avenue, Eltham (ph 9439 7016)
on Tuesday 13th October.

ALL MEMBERS ARE URGED TO ATTEND

**Don't forget the Annual General Meeting:
7pm on Thursday 12th November at the *Gathering Space*,
Our Lady's Church, 4 Henry Street, Eltham.
The guest speaker for the occasion is Elizabeth Kooroonya Savage,
a founding member of the group and our cultural adviser.**



NILLUMBIK RECONCILIATION GROUP INC

(ABN: 61 506 201 828)

Committee members and convenors/representatives are as follows:

Patron	Mick Woiwod	9439 5679
President	Jan Aitken	9439 0342
Vice President	Don Brown	9439 7016
Secretary	Diana Warrell	9439 8565
Treasurer	Sasha Trikojus	9439 3950
General Committee	Pam Pedersen	9439 2688
	Joan Pickard	9439 7016
	Kay Pitts	9439 8957
Friends of Moor-rul Grasslands convenor	Jann Darvill	9439 7342
Public Officer	John Browning	9710 1385
Newsletter and Website	Sasha Trikojus	9439 3950
Cultural advisor	Elizabeth Savage Kooroonya	9710 1471