

Diamond Valley  
**Leader** **Spirits rise after a sorry saga**  
Engel Schmidl  
20<sup>th</sup> February, 2008

NILLUMBIK'S Sorry Day flag-raising ceremony was a small piece in the national mosaic that marked a long-awaited, emotional event.

The low-key ceremony at the civic centre, organised by Nillumbik Reconciliation Group (NRG), first and foremost recognised the pain and grief of the Stolen Generations.

But it also recognised the grassroots role played by groups across Australia such as the NRG in keeping the flame lit for an issue that only a couple of years ago appeared to have been extinguished.

As local historian and group patron Mick Woiwod watched children from Apollo Parkways Primary School raise the Aboriginal flag, he reflected that the day marked a new horizon for Australia.

"You need to start with something symbolic to underpin the practical," Mr Woiwod said.

For NRG members, there was a sense of finally reaching the end of a long, dark tunnel the journey was not over yet, but the darkness had lifted.

"There's been a feeling of deadness about these issues," Mr Woiwod said.

"It's kept going with local groups but there was a deadening in the community about issues such as reconciliation."

Kelli Curr grew up in the Diamond Valley and met her partner, Ricky Drill, in the Kimberley region of Western Australia, where he was born.

They moved to Smiths Gully six years ago for the benefit of their children's education.

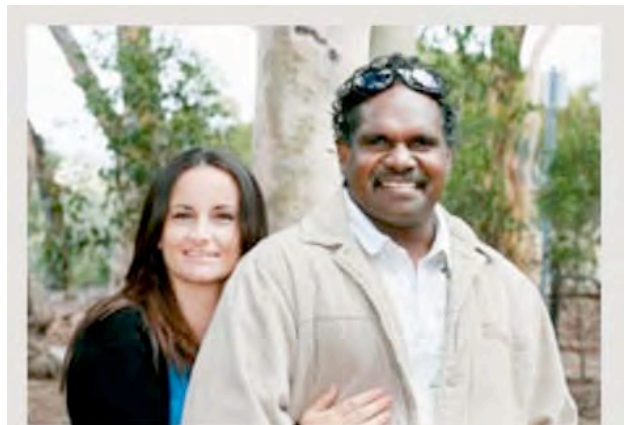
Mr Drill, a noted indigenous artist, is a traditional owner of the Purnululu (Bungle Bungles) National Park near Warmun, Turkey Creek.

"It's recognition. It gives people the freedom to move on with their lives," he said of the local ceremony and Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's apology speech in Parliament.

Ms Curr was impressed with Mr Rudd's speech.

"It felt like more than just saying sorry," she said.

"It felt really sincere and it feels like it came from the heart."



Ricky Drill and Kelli Curr, of Smiths Gully, say the national apology will help Aboriginal Australians move on. Pictures: MITCH BEAR N34DV406



The crowd reflects at the flag-raising ceremony.



Mick Woiwod and Jan Aitken from Nillumbik Reconciliation Group.

NRG president Jan Aitken said the day was the culmination of work local groups had done to keep the reconciliation issue alive.

Ms Aitken said the group had worked with the council since 1998 to make symbolic events such as flag-raising ceremonies a regular event in Nillumbik.

The day carried a "sense of relief and self-respect undermined in the past by the absence of an apology", Ms Aitken said.

"There was a sincerity of spirit that has perhaps been lacking and the raising of the flag here today marks this new spirit," she said.

Nillumbik Mayor Warwick Leeson ran through a potted history of landmark moments in Aboriginal Australia's history in his speech to the crowd.

He said the apology to the stolen generations ranked as "one of the giant leaps in Australian history".

This historic moment, shared across the nation at similar ceremonies and larger gatherings such as that in Federation Square, spoke not only about healing a symbolic rift.

It paid tribute to the passionate persistence of groups such as the Nillumbik Reconciliation Group.