
A message to Aboriginal Treaty Committee Supporters

In our last issue of *The News* we commented on the concern which had developed among members of the committee, our support groups and our friends generally about opposition and doubts which had been expressed by some Aboriginal leaders to the idea of a Makarrata or a treaty. Indeed, in those comments we raised the question of whether, on the face of those views, we should properly continue.

Since the time of that issue we have been in touch with the NAC, the Federation of Land Councils and other National and regional Aboriginal organisations. These communications have satisfied us unreservedly that we should continue and indeed intensify our efforts. It is true that there is, as one would expect, a range of opinions among Aborigines about the Makarrata or a treaty. Doubts, where they exist, derive from unfamiliarity with the concept, from a fear that any treaty will not adequately recognise the status of Aboriginal Australians as the original inhabitants of this continent and a people in their own right, and from a desire to concentrate for the present on immediate issues such as land rights. These doubts continue and are likely to persist while Australian governments continue to equivocate, especially about land and self management.

Despite this it has been made clear to us that all the Aboriginal organisations we have consulted value the work we are doing in raising the level of consciousness about Aboriginal Australians and their cause. They believe that there is an important role for the committee in continuing this work and in mobilising professional and academic help for Aborigines, in enabling them to understand and deal with the complex constitutional, legal, political, social and economic issues which confront them.

The committee has, from the outset, seen this task of examining such issues in an objective professional context as an important part of its work. It has, as you know, sponsored with appropriate academic institutions a series of seminars, conferences and workshops which have helped throw light on them. Aboriginal organisations have been helped to participate in many of these and to have access to the ideas and the analysis which have come from them. It is now clear that Aboriginal organisations wish to follow up these ideas in more concrete form.

While our work in this field must, we believe, be generally available, it is clear that as a result of it Aboriginal organisations will have access to its outcome and to the academic and professional authorities who have participated in it. While the NAC receives some funds to enable it to employ consultants and research workers, these funds are inadequate. Other Aboriginal organisations are dependent wholly on voluntary support. We believe that without going beyond our proper limits we can assist the NAC, the Federation of Land Councils and other organisations by sponsoring studies of issues of concern to them and making those studies public. The outcome will be of value not only to Aborigines but to governments and to the general community in their consideration of the issues. While many sympathetic academic and professional men and women have been willing to undertake such studies without remuneration, this is not always possible if the best talent is to be employed and inevitable expenses met. We will therefore need to call upon supporters for renewed help.

We are in a reasonably comfortable financial position thanks to the generosity of our friends, especially among the artists. We can therefore look forward with confidence for the rest of the year. But this phase of our work will be more arduous and more expensive. We ask you therefore to renew the financial support you have given us in the past.

H. C. COOMBS
Chairman

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"A message to ATC Supporters", by H.C.Coombs, ATC Chairman
Aboriginal Treaty News No. 5, p. 1
(a332907_a.pdf)

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