

Apology to Aboriginal People, Government of Tasmania

1997 – 1997

Details

The Apology to Aboriginal People was made by the Premier, Tony Rundle, on 13 August 1997 in response to the *Bringing them home* report. An Aboriginal elder, Annette Peardon, replied to the apology.

Rundle's motion stated that:

(1) That this Parliament, on behalf of all Tasmanians, expresses its deep and sincere regrets at the hurt and distress caused by past policies under which Aboriginal children were removed from their families and homes, apologises to the Aboriginal people for those past actions and reaffirms its support for reconciliation between all Australians.

(2) That at the conclusion of the debate on the motion, the House invites Ms Annette Peardon as a representative of the Aboriginal community, to address the House at the Bar of the House.

In his speech he said:

This motion is made as a sincere expression of regret in response to the report of the national inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander children from their families, for past actions which took place in Tasmania. Some people have expressed concern to me that the action of the Government in presenting this motion is inappropriate in that policies of removal were considered at that time to be the best response to the needs of those particular children and communities. I accept that many of those removals were undertaken in good faith and in the belief that those actions were in the best interests of the child, however it is clear that in many, if not most, situations the needs of the child, their family and their community were not given the consideration that was due, and that even where good intentions were at the heart of the removal, the manner of the removal and the continuing lack of contact with family and community was harmful.

This apology is made in recognition of the genuine hurt that was caused notwithstanding the motives. The apology is made not only to recognise the fact of the separations but also to further the reconciliation process by accepting that these removals should not have happened. In short, Sir, it is necessary to do so because, as has been said by an elder of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community, Mrs Ida West – and I quote – ‘it is important to say sorry to them because what happened was so terrible’. Those Tasmanian Aborigines who gave evidence to the inquiry, gave clear testimony of the unnecessary and continuing pain visited upon these children.

Annette Peardon began her response with the following words:

Mr Speaker, Premier, honourable members, this is a historic occasion. It is a welcome gesture of the Government and the Parliament to apologise for what must be seen as one of the most tragic events in my people's history. I believe it is the first time any Aborigine in Tasmania has entered the Chamber of the Parliament in session and I believe it is the first time anywhere in Australia an Aboriginal delegation has been invited to address the Parliament in session.

The policy of removal of Aboriginal children from their people was born out of ignorance, ignorance for the basic human rights of Aboriginal children to be raised by their people. It was a policy of genocide, make no bones about it. The policy was deliberate and calculated to make Aborigines like white people. To make us ashamed of who we are. To deny our heritage and our families. That we stand before you today as the proudest of Aborigines you have ever seen or heard is evidence the genocide policy could not work. Today's response by this Parliament is a sign of community maturity; of the State of Tasmania facing up to the responsibilities of harm caused to Aborigines by official policy instead of hiding behind notions of popular history.

Peardon went on to ask for assistance and compensation for Aborigines removed from their families as children, land rights, and an end to discrimination against Aboriginal culture.

More info

Related Entries

Related Events

- [National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission \(1995 - 1997\)](#)
The National Inquiry led to the apology to Aboriginal people by the Tasmanian state government.
- [Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples, Parliament of Australia \(13 February 2008\)](#)

Resources

- Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, [Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families](#), 1997
- Australian Human Rights Commission, [Content of apologies by State and Territory Parliaments](#), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice, 30 March 2008

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