

Month in Review – March

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01.03 Under the draft National Curriculum, released by the Federal Government today, students will learn about Sorry Day and Australia's Indigenous history. Opposition spokesperson for education, Christopher Pyne criticised the document saying 'I am deeply concerned that Australian students will be taught a particular black armband view of our history without any counterbalancing'.

05.03 Professor Mick Dodson of the National Centre for Indigenous Studies was today appointed as the next Chair of Australian Studies at Harvard University. He will take up the temporary post in 2011 and will oversee the Indigenous Development program at the Kennedy School of Government.

11.03 About 200 people gathered outside Parliament House in Brisbane demanding that charges be laid over the death in custody of an 18 year old Aboriginal man last month. Protestors presented Queensland Parliament with a petition calling for a royal commission into institutionalised racism in the state police force. Prison authorities say there were no suspicious circumstances in the death; Queensland Corrective Services Minister, Neil Roberts has promised an investigation into the case.

12.03 The Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association ('AIDA') today released a health impact assessment of the NT Intervention. Using methodology endorsed by the World Health Organisation, the report found the Intervention could cause 'profound' long-term damage, and that any potential benefits to physical health were largely outweighed by negative impacts to psychological health, social health and wellbeing and cultural integrity.

17.03 The Charlie Perkins Trust for Children & Students, together with the Federal Minister for Indigenous Affairs, today announced the inaugural winners of the Charlie Perkins scholarship program. Paul Gray and Christian Thompson, of the University of Sydney and the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology ('RMIT') will be the first Indigenous Australians to study at Oxford University. Hetti Perkins, Chair of the Charlie Perkins Trust, said 'My family are thrilled that two such outstanding candidates have been selected ... their success is a sign of the contribution our people can make to the global community in so many fields. With such talented individuals as role models, I think we can expect more and more young people of our community aspiring to similarly realise their dreams'.

17.03 The WA Government proposed an interim ex-gratia payment of \$200,000 for the family of Mr Ward, an Aboriginal elder who died in 2008 after being transported to Kalgoorlie in the back of a prison van. The payment is yet to be approved by State Cabinet. Marc Newhouse from the Deaths in Custody Watch Committee said family and supporters wanted those responsible for Mr Ward's death to be charged and the contract with prisoner transportation firm G4S terminated.

19.03 GenerationOne, a public awareness campaign designed to encourage employers to offer jobs to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, was launched today. GenerationOne is being privately funded and will run in conjunction with Andrew Forrest's Australian Employment Covenant, an initiative founded two years ago with the Federal Government to provide 50,000 Indigenous jobs. Mr Forrest said 'this isn't about charity ... you employ Aboriginal people because they add value to your business, because they're as smart as paint and they can be trained like any of us can be'.

22.03 The Full Court of the Supreme Court today unanimously dismissed the SA Government's appeal against the \$775,000 compensation judgment in favour of Bruce Trevorrow, a member of the Stolen Generations who was taken from his parents more than 50 years ago. In *South Australia v Lampard-Trevorrow*, the Court found that the Government had been negligent in Mr Trevorrow's case and that the Aborigines Protection Board was in breach of its duty of care. The Court also set aside the original finding that the Government was guilty of unlawful detention. Mr Trevorrow, who died in June 2008, was the first member of the Stolen Generations to win compensation for being removed from his family.

25.03 Approximately 30,000 people took part in the fourth annual Closing the Gap day today, focusing on measures to improve the health of Indigenous Australians. Campaign co-chairman, Tom Calma acknowledged funding increases to Indigenous health services in recent years but called on the Federal Government to establish a comprehensive plan of action to ensure that all agencies involved in health are properly integrated and working together to reduce the 17-year gap in life expectancy.

27.03 Pharmaceutical body Medicines Australia donated \$1 million to the Jimmy Little Foundation to fund two health initiatives in northern and central Australia. The first – Uncle Jimmy Thumbs Up campaign – will promote healthy eating messages to Indigenous children and adults. The second will establish a mobile renal dialysis unit in Alice Springs. Chairman of Medicines Australia, Will Delaat said that both projects were about making a real and practical difference to the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and that all Australians should make an effort to improve life for the Indigenous community.

31.03 A State funeral was held today for Charles 'Chicka' Dixon, who died on March 20 from asbestosis. Mr Dixon, who died at the age of 81, was a lifelong political campaigner. Heavily involved in the 1967 referendum movement and the Aboriginal Tent Embassy of 1972, he played a major part in establishing the Aboriginal Legal Service and many Indigenous arts organisations. In 1984, the National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee ('NAIDOC') named him Australia's first 'Aborigine of the Year' and granted him the Lifetime Achievement award in 2008. Bev Manton, Chair of the NSW Aboriginal Land Council, said 'the Chicka Dixon story is the story of one of Australia's gutsiest fighters for human rights'.

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06.04 Barkly Shire dumped 3000 litres of raw sewage at the local tip in the Ampilatwatja township, a 'prescribed community' under the NT Intervention. Local works manager Mark Fordham said, 'this just shows clearly the attitude the Shire and the Intervention have to Aboriginal people... the new manager decides to push the sewage problem out of sight, out of mind by dumping it where people will get sick instead of paying the money to truck it to Alice Springs.' Alyawarr spokesperson, Richard Downs criticised the Federal Government's compulsory five-year lease over the township and called for control to be returned to the local people. He said, 'after three years of Intervention, we have been left with the most appalling living and working conditions in Australia'.

09.04 About 200 Indigenous young people gathered today in Queensland's far north for the first Cairns Indigenous Youth Summit, where participants talked to local leaders and politicians about issues concerning them. Commenting on the importance of such events, Gurry Watson of the Nintiringanyi Cultural Training Centre said, 'there's a lot of positive young Indigenous people out there and that's the thing that isn't promoted'.

13.04 Two Kimberley communities, Yakanarra and Bayulu, will be declared restricted areas under s 175 *Liquor Control Act 1988* (WA). Under the new controls, police will have power to seize and dispose of opened or unopened liquor containers found in either township. Liquor licensees found to be in breach of the restrictions will be liable for a \$5000 fine, while all other people in breach will be subject to a \$2000 fine.

17.04 Lavan Legal and the WA Aboriginal Legal Service ('ALS'), legal representatives for a group of Aboriginal siblings forcibly removed from their family, are preparing for the first Stolen Generations test case in WA. In 2008, Lavan Legal said that it would prepare writs for up to 1000 claimants but ALS this week wrote to its clients saying that there are insufficient resources to bring a case for all potential claimants. Accordingly, neither Lavan Legal nor the ALS will give advice in respect of any other Stolen Generations claim while the test case is being pursued.

20.04 At the opening session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous issues, New Zealand's Minister for Maori Affairs, Pita Sharples announced that New Zealand is reversing its opposition to the UN *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. Mr Sharples said, 'when voting took place in 2007, Maori – my people – were hugely disappointed that our country had voted against it ... I hope they're relieved and happy that we now have a commitment as a country to the Declaration without any conditions being laid down onto it.'

21.04 Federal Attorney-General, Robert McClelland announced that the Government will not be introducing a human rights act in Australia but will instead release a new human rights Framework. Mr McClelland said 'the Government believes that the enhancement of human rights should be done in a way that as far as possible unites rather than divides our community, and the framework is designed to achieve that outcome'. Father Frank Brennan, who headed the National Human Rights Consultation

questioned whether, when dealing with 'complex and controversial issues', politicians will be 'sufficiently faithful to those obligations when there's not the prospect of some judicial oversight'. President of the Australian Human Rights Commission, Catherine Branson said that, while the new measures are welcome, a human rights act is still needed.

21.04 SA Attorney-General, John Rau said he had no 'current' plans to help fund investigations into injuries suffered at Maralinga as a result of British atomic testing during the 1950s and 1960s. Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement ('ALRM') lawyers in Port Augusta and Adelaide have been collecting information to strengthen their case against the British Government but, according to Chief Executive Officer, Neil Gillespie, the case is becoming too big to manage. The Federal Attorney-General's department is also yet to commit financial assistance to the case.

22.04 Following the SA Court of Appeal's decision in *South Australia v Lampard-Trevorrow*, George and Tom Trevorrow, on behalf of the Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority, are seeking the establishment of a state compensation tribunal to address other potential compensation claims. Attorney-General, John Rau said that 'no consideration of a compensation scheme is currently warranted' but that the State Government will consider a negotiated settlement of future Stolen Generations civil actions.

30.04 Former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Tom Calma was appointed to supervise an Indigenous anti-smoking campaign. Mr Calma said that, 'in the general population, about 18% [of teenagers and adults] smokes but within the Indigenous population it's 50% and, in some of our communities it's up to 80%.' He said that 'almost 20% of deaths can be associated with smoking in the Indigenous population' and that 'we need a different message for Indigenous people.'

30.04 Director of the Indigenous Law Centre, University of New South Wales, Megan Davis, was elected to the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Ms Davis is the first Australian Indigenous woman to be elected and, while nominated by the Australian Government, will serve as an independent expert. Professor Mick Dodson is currently a member of the Permanent Forum but will finish his term later this year.