

# Writing for you

## Meet just some of our new columnists

**M**ORE than one commentator has observed lately that the Indigenous affairs landscape in Australia changes at a frenetic pace. Whether based on government policies, technological advances or good old-fashioned community debate, that change can be good and bad, sometimes both.

And often it's unavoidable, so it's lucky that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, while grounded in thousands of years of tradition, are also an adaptable bunch.

What's important is that we're as well equipped as possible to tackle what life throws at us. And that's the philosophy behind some changes we're making to *The Koori Mail*.

As we flagged in our last edition, we're inviting a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 'with their fingers on the pulse' to contribute to our pages on a semi-regular basis.

They'll be writing with *The Koori Mail's* readership specifically in mind, sharing their perspectives on all kinds of topics related to their professional, personal, family and community lives.

We're delighted to announce the first of these occasional columnists here...

**Chris Sarra** is one of Australia's leading Indigenous education experts and is Director of the Queensland Government's Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership.

He hails from Bundaberg, Queensland, and, growing up the youngest of ten children, experienced first-hand many of the issues faced by Indigenous students throughout their schooling.

Chris has a Bachelor of Education, a Master of Education and a PhD in Psychology.

In the late 1990s, he became the Principal of Cherbourg State School in south-east Qld where he drastically improved school attendance and increased community involvement in education.

Under what has become known as the Strong and Smart philosophy, he espouses a strong and positive sense of what it means to be Aboriginal in today's Australian society, and that Indigenous students can achieve outcomes comparable to other students.

Since 2005, Chris has also been Chair of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts board of the Australia Council for the Arts.

**Bess Nungarrayi Price** is a fierce champion of remote communities, especially women and children living in the NT. Born at Yuendumu in central Australia, her first language is Warlpiri but she also knows Luritja, Western Arrernte and Anmatyerr and English.

Bess has a Bachelor of Applied Science in Aboriginal Community Management and Development from Curtin University and has worked in education and training, public administration, the media, community development, interpreting, translating and language teaching and has experience in small business management.

She is a partner with her husband Dave in Jajirdi Consultants working in cross-cultural awareness training, community



CHRIS SARRA



RHODA ROBERTS



BESS NUNGARRAYI PRICE



COLLEEN HAYWARD



MARK BIN BAKAR



MEGAN DAVIS

liaison and Warlpiri language services.

In recent times she has built up a reputation as an artist through Warlukurlangu Arts Centre, developing a uniquely personal interpretation of traditional themes. She has served on many management committees and boards, and currently chairs the new Indigenous Affairs Advisory Council of the NT.

When asked what she's passionate about, Bess says: "I am most worried about our women and kids and their future.

"There is too much violence, too many early deaths. Right now our kids have no future. They need a real education and the promise of real jobs. There are a lot of things in the way."

**Mark Bin Bakar** has dedicated much of his adult life to increasing cultural understanding amongst Australians.

Born in Derby, Western Australia, and raised in Broome, the Kitja man has dedicated much of his adult life to increasing cultural understanding amongst Australians.

Travelling throughout remote areas giving presentations on alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence, health care, emotional well-being and respect for Elders, and working to instill a sense of pride in the communities, Mark was founding chairperson of the Kimberley Stolen Generation Corporation.

An accomplished musician, he established the Aboriginal corporation Abmusic, creating and co-ordinating Broome's 'Stompem Ground' arts and cultural festival and helping to found the Broome-based Goolarri Media Enterprises.

He is well-known for his popular and award-winning character Mary G, or 'Queen of the Kimberley', through whom he used humour to expose society's stereotypes and raise awareness of social issues facing Indigenous people.

The Kimberley educator and performer was the 2007 NAIDOC Person of the Year and recently had his many achievements recognised with an honorary doctorate from Perth's Edith Cowan University (ECU).

**Megan Davis**, who wrote for us last edition on the Australian Government's formal support for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, is Director of the Indigenous Law Centre and Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Law at the University of NSW.

Her expertise is Indigenous rights in international and public law. She is an Australian member of the International Law Association's Indigenous Rights Committee and a former United Nations Fellow. She is a PhD Candidate in Law at the Australian National University (ANU).

Megan is Cobble Cobble and grew up in south-east Queensland in Mulgildie, Hervey Bay and Eagleby with siblings Alfie, Will, John and Lucy.

In her spare time she likes art history, literature and music, especially Townes van Zandt, Keith Richards, Willie Nelson, Mahler and the Sandy Devlin band. She greatly admires Archie Roach, her mum Dawn and the philosopher Eric Theodore Cartman.

**Rhoda Roberts** is a member of the Bundjalung nation, Widjebal clan of northern NSW and south-east Qld and was raised in Lismore.

As an actor/producer, director, documentary-maker, consultant and performer in theatre, film, television and radio, her involvement in Indigenous arts especially is virtually unparalleled.

She was the first Aboriginal person to host a national prime-time current affairs program (*Vox Populi*, SBS TV), and was Co-Creative Director of the 'Awakening Segment' during the opening ceremony for the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games.

More recently, she has been the Dreaming Festival director, and was creative director of the 2008 Sydney New Year's Eve fireworks, one of the biggest and most watched New Year's pyrotechnic shows anywhere in the world.

In her columns, Rhoda plans to write about the representation of Indigenous arts and culture, authenticity and cultural integrity in all art forms, and the representation of our

people through mainstream mediums including the media, television, drama, film and radio.

Rhoda also has a nostalgic connection to *The Koori Mail*. Her dad, Pastor Frank Roberts, was one of our very first Bundjalung directors.

Asked to describe herself, Rhoda confesses she 'cannot sing a note' and has no dance skills whatsoever.

**Professor Colleen Hayward** is a senior Aboriginal woman of the Nyoongar nation in the south-west of Western Australia and has recently been appointed as Head of the Kurungkurl Katitjin Centre at the Edith Cowan University.

For more than 30 years, Colleen has provided significant input to policies and programs on a wide range of issues, reflecting the needs of minority groups at community, state and national levels.

She has an extensive background in a range of areas including health, education, training, employment, housing and law and justice as well as significant experience in policy and management.

Colleen's work has been recognised through a range of accolades, the highlight being her winning the 2008 National NAIDOC Person of the Year award.

She describes herself as passionate about 'everything that impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, not only the issues that are clearly ours but other things that seem mainstream but still impact on us'.

"Above all, I am a firm believer that we need to be telling our own stories rather than having others do that on our behalf – that is why outlets like *The Koori Mail* are so important," she says.

**So there you have it. If that's all not exciting enough, in coming editions we'll announce others who've agreed to come on board as occasional columnists for *The Koori Mail*. Happy reading!**