

Transcript – National Reconciliation Week



Helga Svendsen 0:00

Hi, folks, welcome to the Take on Board podcast. This week, you'll be hearing from me and I will be talking this week about National Reconciliation Week. And the Uluru statement from the heart because it is National Reconciliation Week here in Australia. I'll tell you more about that in a moment. I would like to start as we always do here at Take on Board by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which we record. For me, that is the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation, and I pay my respects to their elders past and present. I acknowledge their continuing connection to land to culture, to earth and to waters. And giving this as a governance podcast their incredible long-term stewardship of the land is an incredible testament to long-term governance. Again, as I've mentioned before, I support the Uluru Statement from the Heart and I strongly encourage others in the Take on Board community to do so.

Today, I'd like to do five things. Firstly, I'm going to talk about National Reconciliation Week 2023, the theme and what that might mean for all of us. Secondly, I want to talk about National Reconciliation Week more broadly, its history and what it's about. Thirdly, I want to talk about the Uluru Statement from the Heart. And indeed, I'm going to read the full statement to you it is a relatively short statement. Short but powerful. I'll share that with you. Fourthly, I'll share some ideas for your board to support the Uluru Statement from the Heart some of the things that boards that I'm on are doing or that I've heard that others are doing. And last but not least, fifth, I will share some resources, including some of the previous episodes of Take on Board which featured the voices of First Nations women.

First up National Reconciliation Week 2023. The National Reconciliation Week 2023 theme is Be a voice for Generations. The CEO of Reconciliation Australia Karen Mundine, says the theme calls on Australians to honour the work of generations past who fought for justice in Australia, and to work together today to tackle the unfinished business of reconciliation for the generations to come. She says there has been a strong thread in Australian history of people striving to build a just society. Aboriginal history is included many examples of non First Nations Australians, who stood with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people during early strikes, protests, and notably during the 1967 referendum. She goes on to say Australia has a long record of inspiring allyship and solidarity to address centuries of racism and injustice. So this National Reconciliation Week, we urge all

Australians to follow in this tradition to be a voice for generations, whilst also imagining a better country for future generations. She also talks about reconciliation Australia's research which indicates a large reservoir of community support for the next steps in Australia's reconciliation journey, including the voice to Parliament, Treaty making and truth telling. She says that the 2022 Australian Reconciliation Barometer shows that 80% of all Australians believe the creation of a national representative Indigenous body is important and 79% believes such a body should be protected under the Constitution. She says there's growing support for a treaty between First Nations and other Australians, with an almost 20% increase from 53% in 2020 to 72%. Today, support the truth telling also remains very high at 83% for the general community, and 87% for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents. She says that this year's National Reconciliation Week theme urges all Australians to use their power, their words, and their vote to create a better, more just Australia for all of us. So I am hoping to get Karen Mundine on the podcast a little later this year. We have been back and forth about it a little bit a bit with National Reconciliation Week. She has been just a little bit busy. But I'm hoping to feature her voice a bit later to talk about some of these themes to talk about the research and to talk about The Voice and why it's important. Her urging of us to use our power, our words and our vote to create a better more just Australia for all of us is partly why I have chosen this week to talk about National Reconciliation Week and to talk about The Voice to Parliament. Because I have voice. I have a bit of a platform through you the Take on Board community and I want to be able to share some of these these important things with you. And I know you have a voice as well because you're either in boardrooms or looking to be in boardrooms. So I ask that you use your voice as well, to create that better, more just Australia for all of us.

Let's take a step back. And secondly, I wanted to touch on National Reconciliation Week. So in Australia, that is from the 27th of May to the 3rd of June, every year. It's on those dates every year. And it's a time for all Australians to learn about our shared histories, cultures and achievements, and to explore how each of us can contribute to achieving reconciliation in Australia. The dates for National Reconciliation Week are the bookends of two significant milestones in Reconciliation history. Firstly, the 1967 referendum, and closing with the High Court Mabo decision. So on the 27th of May 1967. That was the day of Australia's most successful referendum, which saw more than 90% of Australians vote to give the Australian government power to make laws for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and to recognize them in the census. I'm hoping that our referendum coming later this year in 2023, has similar support. The closing of National Reconciliation Week is on the third of June, and that commemorates that in 1992. On that day, the Australian High Court delivered the Mabo decision. The combination of Eddie Koiki Mabo's challenge to the legal fiction of Terra Nullius. That is that the land belonged to no one and it led to the legal recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional owners and custodians of lands. This decision paved the way for Native Title. Reconciliation must live in the hearts, minds and actions of all Australians as we move forward, creating a nation strengthened by respectful relationships between the wider Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Just a little bit of history about National Reconciliation Week. It started as a week of prayer for reconciliation in 1993, which was the International Year of world's Indigenous peoples. And that week of prayer was supported by Australia's major faith communities. Three years later, in 1996, the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation launched Australia's first National Reconciliation Week.

And then in 2001, Reconciliation Australia was established to continue to provide national leadership on reconciliation. In the same year, about 300,000 people walked across Sydney Harbour Bridge as part of National Reconciliation Week, and subsequently across bridges in cities and towns across Australia to show their support for reconciliation. There is more information on the National Reconciliation Week, website and fact sheet, which is part of Reconciliation Australia, I'll make sure there is a link to that in the show notes. So today, National Reconciliation Week is celebrated in workplaces, in schools in early learning services community organisations and groups and by individuals Australia-wide. How can you or your group or organisation get involved? So as I mentioned, visit the Reconciliation Australia website for more information and to discover what activities and events are taking place in your local area during National Reconciliation Week. On a personal level, you can think about what you can do locally and take the time to learn about the rich Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures that exist in Australia. And importantly, find the time to talk with your family, your friends and your colleagues about why it's important for all Australians to build respectful relationships with each other, and especially with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Thirdly, I want to touch on the Uluru Statement from the Heart. You will have heard me say on this podcast that I support the Uluru Statement from the Heart. So today, I'd like to read that statement to you. As I mentioned at the top of the episode, it's a short, yet powerful statement.

Uluru Statement from the Heart - we gathered at the 2017 National Constitutional Convention, coming from all points of the southern sky make this Statement from the Heart. Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands and possessed it under our own laws and customs. This our ancestors did, according to the reckoning of our culture, from the creation according to the common law from time immemorial and according to science, more than 60,000 years ago. This sovereignty is a spiritual notion, the ancestral tie between the land or Mother Nature, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born there from, remain attached there to, and must one day return the hither to be united with our ancestors. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil or better of sovereignty. It has never been ceded or extinguished and coexists with the sovereignty of the crown. How could it be otherwise? That peoples possessed a land for 60 millennia, and this sacred link disappears from World History in merely the last 200 years. With substantive constitutional change, and structural reform, we believe this ancient sovereignty can shine through as a fuller expression of Australia's nationhood. Proportionally, we are the most incarcerated people on the planet. We are not an innately criminal people, our children are alienated from their families at unprecedented rates. This cannot be because we have no love for them. And our youth languish in detention in obscene numbers, they should be our hope for the future. These dimensions of our crisis tell plainly the structural nature of our problem. This is the torment of our powerlessness. We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take our rightful place in our own country. When we have power over our destiny, our children will flourish. They will walk into worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country. We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution. Makarrata is the culmination of our agenda: the coming together after a struggle. It captures our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia

and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination. We seek a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history.. In 1967, we were counted in 2017, we seek to be heard, we leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country. We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.

This is me talking again now folks, that was me quoting the Uluru Statement from the Heart. And with apologies for any mispronunciation or errors that were made. And obviously, I am not a First Nations person, yet I am speaking the words of First Nations people. So I hope that's okay. And I'm back to my words now, in saying it's an incredibly powerful statement. How could you not support it, and I call on all in the Take on Board community to read the Uluru Statement from the Heart, perhaps to do what I've just done and read it aloud. Perhaps open a board meeting, reading it aloud or open your you know, launch of a Reconciliation Action Plan by reading it aloud. Share it at a staff meeting, share it with your family, share it with your colleagues, share it with your boards, share it, it's important. Which leads me to the fourth point in this podcast today. Just a couple of things that the boards that I am on have been doing about the Uluru Statement from the Heart. One of the boards that I am on consulted with our Aboriginal reference group about the position the organisation should take in relation to the Uluru Statement from the Heart and The Voice referendum. In another organisation, the chair of the board convened an open meeting of all interested staff to talk about the referendum and to determine a position information was provided and a respectful open discussion took place. That conversation centered on two key questions. How do we respond as an organisation? And secondly, what can we do as a group of interested staff? And the conversation focused on how to educate ourselves and how to create awareness in discussion of next steps. The outcomes from that meeting of staff included firstly, acknowledging this is just the start of a process. Secondly, that the organisation will take a couple of actions that the board will consider a motion in support of the statement and the voice to Parliament. And the people and culture area will progress the Reconciliation Action Plan data gathering and training up opportunities. The third outcome was that the group would continue to meet to deepen their own understanding and explore how we can involve more staff and share information on the statement and the voice. So this reconciliation week, we've been asked to use our voice. So again, I ask you as a member of the Take on Board community, share your voice. Share your voice with your friends, your colleagues, your families. Share your voice in the tea room, in the lounge room, and yes, even in the boardroom. Share the Uluru Statement from the Heart, share the conversation and the resources about National Reconciliation Week, share your thoughts and your feelings and your heart around these incredibly important issues.

So number five, I said I would share some resources. So last but not least, here are some of those and they will all be linked in the show notes. First up the Uluru Statement from the Heart website has some fantastic resources and of course, has the statement itself. Secondly, Reconciliation Australia has a range of resources around reconciliation week, what it all means and how we can use our voice. So ideas for activities as well as the events that are already planned. And of course, there are a range of First Nations voices that have already been featured in this Take on Board podcast. So

you might like to go back all the way to 2019 for episode 10 and listen to Amber Roberts on rethinking the meaning of country and how we can be allies in the boardroom. Or you might like to hear from Sheena Watt on breaking down preconceptions in the boardroom. That was episode 19. And Sheena who is a Take on Board alumni is now a member of the upper house in the Victorian State Parliament. In Episode 138, Jillian West gives us the what's the wise and the house of Reconciliation Action Plans and the role of the board. So there's some excellent tips in there if you haven't started that journey yet, or indeed if you have and you want some other ideas. Episode 139 Rochelle Towart reveals the secrets of getting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on your board. Hint she runs a recruitment agency focused on First Nations people and they will advertise your board roles. So no excuses get on it. Episode 164 back with Jillian West, where we talked through the basics of cultural competency. And then most recently, Episode 194 With Nareen Young, who talked to us about what Australian boards get wrong about diversity and Indigenous governance. So folks, go and listen up, read up, but most importantly, use your voice. This is an incredibly important year for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. And for those of us that are not from First Nations communities, it's probably even more important for us to use our voice. Because Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been doing this for years and it's now up to us to use our voice, our power and our vote to enshrine a voice to Parliament. for First Nations people in Australia. Go forth and do it. And I'd love to hear from you about what your board or even just what you're doing as an individual to support some of these actions. So go forth national reconciliation week, make it count. See you next week.

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