National Indigenous Law Conference opening

Time: 9:00am
Date: Thursday 16 November, 2017
Place: Allen Scott Auditorium
• Good morning

• Today, 50 years on since the 1967 referendum, we meet to consider the past and plan the future.

• The theme of this conference is ‘Aboriginal Lives Matter: 50 Years on since the 1967 Referendum, Restoring, Reclaiming and Revitalising Our Rights in Law’

• so you don’t need me to tell you what you’re all here for.

• This is the South Australian chapter – Watpa Meyunna (WAT-PA MEE-YOONA) - of the 12th National Indigenous Legal Conference

• I think it beggars belief that we still have to make statements like ‘Aboriginal lives matter’,

• but maybe, through the work that you all do, we might come to a point in the future where such a statement is no longer necessary.
• This is the 50th anniversary of the 1967 referendum which made history.

• Australians voted overwhelmingly to amend the constitution to include Aboriginal people in the census and to allow the Commonwealth to create laws for them.

• It was the highest Yes vote ever recorded in a referendum in a country famous for not passing referenda.

• 90.77 per cent of people voted for change.

• Nobody ever formulated a NO case against the amendments.

• And while the referendum was initially just a symbolic victory,
• it did eventually give the then Labor Prime Minister Gough Whitlam the moral mandate he needed to start making real changes for the lives and the prospects of Aboriginal people.

• Who would ever forget the man who, in August 1975, poured desert soil through the hand of Gurindji stockman Vincent Lingiari to signify the return of more than 3000 square kilometres of Gurindji ancestral land?

• It started the process that became the Northern Territory Land Rights Act.

PAUSE

• This University has always had a strong reconciliation mission.

• It was part of our founding legislation and it is one that my predecessors have built on.
• We are committed to be the university of choice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

• We were the first South Australian university to develop and release a Reconciliation Action Plan in 2014;

• and we have completed a number of the actions that we planned back then.

• Actions like acknowledgement of country on each of our campuses;

• displaying major Aboriginal artworks –

• if you get a chance go to the Jeffrey Smart Building across the road and take a look at Yvonne Koolmatrie’s Eel Traps.

• She revitalised a cultural practice that was core to the lives of Aboriginal people.
• You’ll also see some nice examples of Kaurna weaving in the Jeffrey Smart Building.

• But back to the Reconciliation Action Plan

• We have also evaluated, and continue to fund, the Aboriginal Graduate Program;

• our 2% Aboriginal employment target was approved by SMG and an Aboriginal Employment Strategy was developed to outline strategy for reaching the target.

• There are some real exciting ongoing activities coming up.

• We have, for instance, commissioned new processional music for graduations, written by Yorta Yorta woman, soprano, composer and educator, Deborah Cheetham;

• Coolamons and message sticks will also be carried in that procession;
• a short publication on Kaurna, Boandik and Barngarla peoples has been discussed and designed with key Aboriginal stakeholders to be distributed at key locations;

• Just yesterday we celebrated the inaugural alumni meeting of graduates of the Cultural Awareness workshops program.

• More than 1000 of our staff, from senior management on down, have been through a compelling presentation of history and experience delivered by Bookabee Australia’s Haydyn Bromley and our own Deanne Hanchant-Nichols

• and these staff are now charged to be champions of programs such as NAIDOC and Racism It Stops With Me with their own peer groups across the university.
• Our next steps, part of the stretch RAP, which is part of Universities Australia’s Indigenous Strategy, focus on increasing Aboriginal involvement and attainment in higher education.

• Some of the actions that we’ll undertake to make that happen include:
  
  o making Aboriginal education, research and employment priority areas in our core policy and business plan documents;
  o having Aboriginal Research Strategies in place by next year;
  o having processes that ensure all student will encounter and engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural content as integral parts of their course of study; and
  o having more staff complete cross-cultural training programs.

• And still the fight goes on.
• Over the next two days you are going to hear from some fascinating speakers including:

  o The Honourable Chief Justice of South Australia, Chris Kourakis who is going to tell you about Listening to Aboriginal Voices;
  o Tamara Starblanket from the Cree Nation who is Coordinator and instructor for the Justice Studies program at the Native Education College in Vancouver;
  o Sharon Venne, also from the Cree Nation, who is a writer, lecturer and researcher on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Treaties;
  o Marcelle Burns, a Goomeroi Kamilaroi (GOOM-AROI, KAM-ILLA-ROI) woman who is a lecturer at the University of New England and has worked in the field of Indigenous peoples and the law both as a legal practitioner and academic and is committed to promoting greater recognition of the rights of first nations peoples; and
  o our own Irene Watson, Professor of Law at UniSA whose focus is on Indigenous knowledges and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Law
• Just a note here that Tamara Starblanket, Sharon Venne and Marcelle Burns all contributed to the book that Irene Watson has recently edited and published.

• The book is called *Indigenous Peoples are Subjects in International Law* and this will be the first time all four have gathered to discuss and officially launch the book.

• I know you will all learn a great deal from each of these speakers and from the discussions that will follow in these two days and into the future.

• I wish you all the best for these two days, and for the next few thousand and am proud to welcome you to our place on Kaurna land.

• Thank you.