

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

Bairnsdale—Monday, 2 December 2019

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WITNESS

Mr Alan Coe, Wiradjuri, Eora, Yorta Yorta Elder.

The CHAIR: Allan, you understand that this is being recorded? You have heard me say it four or five times this morning.

Mr COE: Yes, I do.

The CHAIR: Good on you. Talk to us.

Mr COE: Righto. I have been sitting here listening. The backbone of a strong society is the family unit. We as a society are breaking the family unit down and distorting the family unit and changing the dynamics of the family, and when you do that it falls apart. When it falls apart, you have the crutches: drug addiction, domestic violence, alcoholism. For Aboriginal people settlement destroyed our whole being: who we are, how we live, why—mentally, physically, holistically and spiritually. You break that, you destroy the society. An intergenerational post-traumatic stress disorder is what we live with: the highest incarceration rate in the world, highest youth and male suicide in the world, high rates of domestic violence, high rates of homelessness.

I mentioned Arthur Phillip's *Instructions*, the draft copy, the foundation law of this land. The Annotated Constitution is a 1174-page book signed by Queen Victoria. Alongside the constitution is the manual, and according to this book a lot of things that happened to our people are acts of treason, and they continue.

You mentioned racism. Racism lives in the psyche of White Australia, and it is maintained and facilitated by the media organisations in this country. And you want to talk about fixing our problems: you have to come and see it from our side of the fence. We have had governments come and say, 'We're going to do this for you. We're going to do that for you'. It does not work, unless you come and look at it from our way, and when I say that, I want you to come and sit down in the dirt with us. You have to see our kids running around, snotty noses and whatever. Six and a half years ago I crawled out of the gutter—one of the biggest lying, thieving, rorting mongrel dogs who ever walked out of Sydney. I had to change; I had grandchildren. I had to honour my elders past and present. To do that, I have to build on their legacy.

Now I attend Fulham prison. I mentioned before about revolving doors. I see fellas go. They go into town and a couple of weeks later they come back. Their biggest struggle is homelessness. I became aware of this after the AJF in Orbost in 2016. We have been talking about trying to establish a hostel for those men getting out and also for men with domestic violence issues—somewhere where they can sort through their problems, sort through the drug and alcohol problem, reconnect with their families in a different way, shape and form. Okay? People say, 'Oh, but how do we do this and how do we do that?'. How many companies in this country have been making billions off the land for so long? Isn't it time for them to pay? Why should the taxpayer have to pay? Yet I see our governments—federal—doing things for other countries, giving other countries money. We have people living on the streets, Australians—disgusting. And the Annotated Constitution—they are accountable. Let me ask you the question: oath or affirmation of office?

The CHAIR: I took an affirmation.

Mr COE: Okay. Well, you are accountable to Arthur Phillip's *Instructions*, the draft copy. You are accountable to the Annotated Constitution. You are accountable to the letters patent. You are accountable to the *Pacific Islanders Protection Act* signed by Queen Victoria. The Annotated Constitution says, as far as we are concerned, we are to be safe from harm and instructed in religion. It does not say what religion. But you cannot break a people. In Western Australia they want to take them off the land. We are connected to the land. You break that connection, you break our people. When you break those connections—you put them in a town or whatever—their family unit breaks down, their spiritual belief breaks down, their holistic connection breaks down. When that happens, all the negatives that we are talking about become who we are and what we are. We cannot live with that. Right? So I want to say to you today: you have to understand that. You have to understand who we are here, first and foremost—who we are here—and give us what we need.

Aboriginal people do not want mansions. We want our own homes. We want to be able to put our nan and pop in a flat out the back where we are together. We want our communities tight again. We want our families to have every aspect of holistic being in raising our children—not having the education department tell us how to raise our children, not having the government tell us how to raise our children. That is not their job. That is our job.

The CHAIR: Allan, I really appreciate this. You have said many true words here to us and sometimes they are uncomfortable words, and I really appreciate them. We are determined—

Mr COE: I will either be good ammunition or a nightmare.

The CHAIR: Yes. I think I want you on my side, not the other.

Mr COE: And I tell you, I operate from sovereignty: I am a sovereign man.

The CHAIR: Well, thank you. It is very good for us to be reminded of everything that you have said. We are determined to go on country to speak to our Aboriginal communities throughout this Inquiry. We are doing that, so I suspect our paths may cross again, which will be a good thing, I am sure.

And I would just like to thank Tim Bull for coming along.

Witness withdrew.