

Sorry said at last



Bidya (elder): "I come from Jigalong. Today is a good day. They say sorry. It's very, very good, I am happy today."

Parnpajinya: the apology

AT LEAST four generations of indigenous Australians gathered last Wednesday in Newman to watch the live coverage of the Parliament apology. Many of the people of the Parnpajinya community were moved by this long-awaited occasion, including indigenous elder Dawn Oates who said: "Today is a very important day of Government recognition. It's important that white society understands us. Now they say sorry hopefully they will understand more about my people".

While some of the children were too young to grasp the concept of today's ceremony there certainly was an air of knowing that something important was taking place.

"While the apology doesn't change what happened, it is the beginning of a time for healing the effects of what occurred. An acknowledgement (by the government) of what was committed in the past, gives these people back their dignity, and that's what is most important," said one of Newman's non-indigenous residents invited by the Parnpajinya to join them at the ceremony.

Story & photos: Brydie-Lee Sheen



A day that's been a long time coming for Lorna, Milly and Sarah.



Repairing the damage

The following is taken from a speech to Parliament by WA Senator Chris Evans, Leader of the Government in the Senate and Minister for Immigration and Citizenship.

IT HAS been written that the pain and suffering cannot be addressed unless the whole community listens with an open heart and mind to the stories of what happened and, having listened and understood, commits itself to repair the damage.

It is awful to comprehend the pain and suffering of the children who were removed and the anguish of their parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles. The trauma of removal is indescribable.

Every parent fears the death of their children. The forcible separation from their children must have been equally traumatic. To have such a policy organised and sanctioned by the national government would only have added to the trauma and a feeling of helplessness.

The past is always with us. It shapes the present and the future. It shapes who

we are and how we behave. It determines the colour of our thinking, and we can only progress when we acknowledge the good and the bad that has happened.

The Prime Minister has apologised for the laws and policies of past governments, which caused profound grief and loss on many Indigenous Australians. And he promised that this will never happen again. He has committed us to a new beginning – a new national effort. And we must succeed.

The response of the nation to Wednesday's apology has been wonderful. People are embracing the opportunity to do the right thing – to do what we teach our children to do – to say sorry for doing something hurtful – and importantly to mean it.

Non-Indigenous Australians should be proud that we are strong enough as a people to say sorry.

I know that it is a day that many Indigenous Australians believed they would never live to see. It has been far

too long coming. For that, I am sorry too. And we acknowledge those who did not live to see this day. To their descendants we say sorry for the pain and hurt suffered over generations and the loss of identity, family and country that can never be restored.

Much has been said in the past weeks about the symbolism of an apology and its significance. Some have argued that the symbolic act of saying sorry will somehow undermine or even replace the practical reforms needed to fix the huge gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

The Government is making a concerted effort to ensure the fundamentals of a decent life are shared by Indigenous Australians – good health and nutrition, a safe and comfortable home, a high quality education and the opportunity to share in the dividends of our economy through work. We are determined to make sure all children, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, have the same healthy future.

Clockwise from top: Paddy Collie hears the apology that has taken a long time to be said. A more than expected number turned up for the ceremony and there was a positive response from both indigenous and non-indigenous. May Brooks (Elder). It was clear to many of the children that the day was a special one. Dawn Oates (Elder), who hoped that now the nation had said sorry her people would be better understood.



Nola with Bethany: "Family is what makes us who we are!"

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