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ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDERS**

LAUNCH OF RECONCILIATION ACTION PLAN

48TH NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY

ADELAIDE

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******CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY******

Good morning everybody.

I too would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land upon which we meet, and I pay my respects to elders past and present.

When we think about where we sit in this hall, in this city, our nation stands on what is, was and always will be Aboriginal land and we acknowledge that today.

I was listening to Pat Dodson, as I know this whole gathering was. And like all of you I want to thank him for his words, thank him for his wisdom but I also want to thank him for making a decision, more than two and a half years ago, to join our Labor family as our Senator for Western Australia.

Pat is like a lot of truly modest people. They don't always realise how much they are loved by others.

And to all of you here in the Labor family and movement, and to Australians watching today, when Pat speaks in the Parliament and when he speaks in our caucus and our meeting rooms, he has this almost magical effect of making the rest of us feel better about ourselves. And that has been a journey of teaching and learning that Pat has been on his whole life.

I first met Pat 14 or 15 years ago when I was with the Australian Workers Union, and he took me through the Kimberley and to Fitzroy Crossing and he showed me parts of Australia that I didn't realise existed.

And I remember thinking back then, wouldn't it be good if this outstanding leader, a leader of all Australians, could make it through our Labor process and end up as one of our Senators.

I wasn't quite sure then how that would happen, but it has. And Pat joining his story with the Labor story enhances and enriches the Labor story.

Thinking about his journey and his teaching of all of us, I went with our Caucus Committee, our ATSI Caucus Committee, Warren Snowdon the local member, we visited Katherine, in the Northern Territory, where Pat spent some of his young years.

And he took me along a road, Fourth Street, and he pointed to scrub near where he grew up, in the house he grew up.

And he explained to me that in 1960, in his lifetime, his beloved sister took him from the house and hid him in the scrub because welfare were coming down Fourth Street to take the children away and to send them out to Croker Island.

And then he told me about his first night, the next year, when he went to boarding school in Casteron, a very well regarded school - a lot of champion footballers. Pat said he was a Collingwood six-footer, which means not quite.

But he did tell me about his first night there, which perhaps is not as amusing.

Because of his skin colour, his was the only bed in the boarding school without sheets on it.

Then he comes back from school to visit his family back up in Katherine. There was a 'rights for whites' meeting, as if the white people of Katherine were being put upon.

Now, he says that we was approached by the local Jawoyn people and they said: "You've been to school, you go and tell them why they're wrong."

Pat said, "I'll do a couple more years of schooling and then I'll tell them why they're wrong."

These are just little snippets of an amazing story, and the reason why I perhaps

focus on his story is this: it really shouldn't have taken us 48 National Conferences to develop a Reconciliation Action Plan. But we have one now.

And we do so in part because of our First Nations' caucus.

How lucky are we, all of us as Australians, to have leaders from our First Nations' people like Pat, who came through the experience.

Stories which children today would think would be more akin to a Mississippi or the stories of civil rights in other parts of the world, but it's in our own country, in the lifetime of own people and the problems still persist right now.

How lucky are we that we have the Father of Reconciliation, seeking to be part of the next Labor Government.

How lucky are we also that he'll serve alongside that remarkable Wiradjuri woman and leader, Linda Burney.

Linda has explained to us in the Parliament that she wasn't counted in the Commonwealth Census until she was 14 years old.

But at the next election, if things go the way we hope, from someone not counted in our census she will be a cabinet minister in a Commonwealth Government.

And of course we've got our outstanding senator for the Northern Territory here with us on the stage. A Yanyuwa woman, Malarndirri McCarthy.

Anyone else in our caucus will tell you this, not only does she bring vibrancy and energy to our political discourse, she brings a marvellously fresh set of eyes to the old problems.

Now, it has taken our party the best part of 120 years to have three First Nations' members in our caucus.

But sometimes at these conventions and in the gatherings of the ALP, the progressive party of Australian politics, there are moments which are even greater than the sum of the parts.

And I feel this is such a moment.

The fact that our party recognises and wants to be the party of choice for First Nations' people, we understand the only way we can even begin to contemplate such a privilege, is by ensuring that in our ranks, we do have our First

Australians.

Now some of the state parties have been very good and they have led the way, some perhaps need to do more work. But we are here now.

And when you look at our movement's contribution to equal rights and to Reconciliation, we can hold our head up - not exclusively - but we have been in the lead more often than not.

It's been ten years since Kevin Rudd delivered the apology to the Stolen Generations, an act of Labor leadership and national healing.

The apology though wasn't just the recognition of the wrongs of the past, it was a promise to do better in the future.

And later today, our discussion in our discussion of chapter 9, we will talk about our commitment to the unfinished business of Reconciliation:

- Enshrining a voice for First Nations' people in the Constitution.
- Establishing a Makarrata Commission, for truth-telling and treaty.
- And genuine partnership and progress on Closing the Gap.

Simply put, Labor believes that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples deserve equal opportunity and an equal share in our nation's future.

The equal right to a great education and a good job.

The equal right to be safe in their home and their community, to be healthy in their life.

And an equal right to justice in the courts of the land.

And when we say this, we reject unequivocally the notion that by closing the gap we are somehow giving a special advantage to our First Australians. Right now, our First Australians do not start a equally in life - we are just redressing an imbalance.

And I say to those who complain about policies which want to close the gap: why are you so scared by providing an equal go to people who do not have an equal go to start with.

So we will recognise above all else, that these solutions and policies have to be authored and owned by First Nations' people themselves.

We must, and we will, focus on local empowerment, on the principle of community control.

The Reconciliation Action Plan that we launch this morning is about what we can do to continue to improve our culture and our structures as the party for the advancement for First Nations' people.

This plan is not a nod to good intentions, it is not a tick-box exercise. It is a set of overdue concrete steps and clear goals.

We want to see:

- More First Nations' people as members of our party
- More First Nations' people as members of a parliament and as senators.
- And more First Nations' people enrolled to vote, to make sure that their policy priorities are national political issues.

We want to deliver and make Labor the party of choice for the First Australians but we need to earn that right.

So, delegates, for me - and I'm sure for all of us here - the First Nations' members of our parliament and our party are simply an inspiration.

I acknowledge also the Reconciliation Working Group, the support and leadership of the National Executive, Karren Mundine and Reconciliation Australia who have worked to put this document together.

And finally, I'd also like to give a shout-out to the artist, Elizabeth Close sitting up in front of us. We sometimes get a lot of speakers up the front but not a lot of artists...of sorts.

So, we all have a part to play, from members of parliament, to branch members, to union delegates and to volunteers.

Reconciliation is Australia's unfinished business.

And, delegates, it is Everyone's Business.

I commend this marvellous plan to the Conference.

Thank you very much

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