



NAIDOC Week 2018 - Flag Raising Ceremony

Commissioner's apology speech

Kiya wanjoo Whadjuk Noongar boodjar.

Hello and welcome to Whadjuk Noongar country and the headquarters of the Western Australia Police Force.

I acknowledge the Whadjuk Noongar People as the original custodians of the land on which we meet, and in the context of this important week - NAIDOC week – the theme 'Because of Her, We Can', the 'Her' is represented by 'mother earth' on which we stand, as depicted in red on the Aboriginal flag.

In light of 'Because of Her, We Can', and in building on this year's theme for Reconciliation Week, 'Don't Keep History a Mystery', I have considered this broader context alongside aspects of our own policing history for today's speech.

Some of the comments I'll be making shortly are confronting and may make some people feel uncomfortable, but I understand that truth-telling is an important part of enabling and facilitating change.

And so, today, on behalf of the Western Australia Police Force, I would like to say sorry to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for our participation in past wrongful actions that have caused immeasurable pain and suffering.

As the legislated protectors of Aboriginal people, police played a significant role in contributing to a traumatic history, which continues to reverberate today.

An example of that history, police officers were tasked with removing children from their parents – part of the trauma that contributed to what we now know as 'the Stolen Generation'.

I accept that previous laws, practices and policies deeply affected the lives of Aboriginal people, and that police involvement in historical events has led to mistrust in law enforcement and the damaging of our relationship.



The forceful removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families and their communities; the displacement of mothers and their children, sisters, fathers and brothers – the loss of family and resulting destruction of culture, has had grave impacts.

In addition, land dispossession, violence, racism, incarceration and deaths in custody have occurred through a history of conflict with Aboriginal people and police.

The intergenerational impacts of this suffering continue to impact the welfare of Aboriginal people who are overrepresented in our justice system today.

We cannot change the past but we can learn from it.

We can make amends and ensure mistakes are not repeated.

From this day forward, and in my time as Police Commissioner, I will take steps to heal historical wounds between police and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

I accept our tumultuous history, acknowledge the devastating impact of our actions and take ownership of being part of the problem.

Today I would like to commence a new journey in unison with Aboriginal people towards achieving reconciliation.

I am committed to working with Aboriginal people to improve our relationships and foster meaningful and positive change for future generations.

I'd like to acknowledge the good work and achievements we have already made together with Aboriginal people, especially in diverting youth from the justice system.

But there is more we need to do. As I speak, I know that Aboriginal youth are more likely to appear in our courts than non-Aboriginal youth.

Our initiative to improve is our Aboriginal Cadet Program which began in 2016. Since its inception 45 cadets have joined the program and, earlier this year, five Aboriginal Cadet Graduates became sworn police officers.



I am grateful to have two graduates from the program here today; Constable Maddison Ugle and Constable Jacob Collard, who raised the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags earlier today.

The innate cultural understanding of these constables will help bridge a gap between Aboriginal people and the justice system; and this will no doubt be life changing for the community members' lives these officers will touch.

We can already see this in action at the Warakurna Multi-Functional Police Facility near the WA/NT border – which is the first entirely Indigenous-run police station in this state. The relationships built by officers in this area have had a positive impact on the community, and I note a drop in the crime rate in that area has also occurred.

I am very pleased Brevet Sergeant Wendy Kelly of the Warakurna Multi-Functional Police Facility was able to join us today and I thank her for her honest and inspiring words. Wendy – you are an excellent role model and a true example of 'Because of Her, We Can'.

Her officer in charge, Brevet Senior Sergeant Revis Ryder is unable to be with us today as he is in Warakurna, policing the lands.

But, despite these positive actions, we still have a long way to go.

Police are working with Government and communities to implement diverse approaches and opportunities to address and reduce Aboriginal offending and victimisation in our communities.

To move forward we must build strong relationships based on trust and respect, which are free of racism and allow for the integration of 'self-determination' for Aboriginal people into our practices and strategic direction.

Today, in the spirit of reconciliation that the WA Police Force are entering with Aboriginal people, we raised the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags as a permanent feature at Police Headquarters to symbolise and recognise the important role Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people play in Western Australian communities.

I am passionate about police working to improve the lives of Aboriginal people through considered consultation and actions that



will result in enduring change.

My desire for change in the way police and Aboriginal people interact was exemplified by what is happening in recent times in Wyndham.

The rapport built between police and Aboriginal youth is now so good, a senior elder told me that Aboriginal children are now running towards police as their friend and protector, rather than running away.

And I hope that I can rebuild the trust in our police force as one of a beacon of protection and service to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

I am optimistic about a more positive future, but today we are deeply sorry. Thank you.

Thank you

Commissioner Chris Dawson

Chris Dawson
Commissioner of Police