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Malaise, Meditation and Magnificence: The leadership required in Australia

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Presentation by

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Thank you Denis Moriarty, for allowing me the honour of being with all of you today. Thank you too, Father Joe Caddy for your warm welcome, and to Ron Murray for introducing and acknowledging country. I also wanted to thank the Honourable Peter Ryan for his opening remarks and hope that I too might celebrate all that we the community sector are, and whom we all can be together.

As is our custom, I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land where we are meeting today, the Wurrunjuri peoples of the Kulin Nation. I pay my respects to your Elders past and present. We celebrated on the weekend Sorry Day, and commenced with Michael Long the long walk to recognition at Federation Square. In recognition of the need for a reconciled Australia, I want to acknowledge your Elders past and present, and thank them for living a life that allows all of us to be here in this room together today; especially to you who've joined with Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples and now call Australia home.

It is with a deep appreciation for the contribution to Australian life made by the many nations of Australia's First Peoples – other proud Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the audience, my creative colleague Mr. Wayne Quillam who has allowed me to use some of his images to accompany this speech, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, it is indeed an honour to address you in this, the Communities in Control conference where we are reclaiming community in a selfish world.

I LOVE reclaiming community – and because of this – I want you to reclaim those people close to you. Please take this time to make the acquaintance of the six people closest to you – explain who you are, where you are from and briefly ask and answer what it is that you want to get out of the next couple of days.

Thank you for that!

I am going to spend some time today reflecting on leadership, particularly leadership that draws on our deepest human values, fosters wisdom, creativity and resilience, and helps us learn to adapt and thrive

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in challenging environments. I do this because it will be your leadership that will create a better world. Leadership is what we need in this country and others: leadership in our families, in our communities and nation.

To me, each and every one of you exemplifies a leadership that is radical and compassionate, original and creative, straight, strong, ethical and true. It is a leadership that sees and responds to suffering, takes the time to celebrate successes in the lives of people for whom this is a rare and beautiful thing: you all understand and defend the principle of care giving. To me, you are the champions of our time, and you leave a profound legacy for us to follow.

Some of us understand too well what it means to be morally responsible for injustice. When we see an injustice being done, we feel compelled to respond, even if we do not know how. We exemplify through the life we lead, through our work, through our insights and mentorship, by our example, all that it means to be 'human', to live up to the opportunity of our existence. Some of us instigate political and social actions that directly transform the way in which the vulnerable in our community are now thought of and responded to in this and other countries. In doing so, what we also do is find a way of nurturing our future. I think all of us here can agree that children are our future. And we can, and we must, do all within our power to protect all our children, as our collective investment in this future, particularly in these worrying times, in a world that seems short of good ideas about how to address the complexity of issues with which we are faced.

That is why I have titled this speech *Malaise, Meditation and Magnificence: The leadership required in Australia*.

Malaise: because we need to overcome this unconscious way of living, this malaise, which I believe is the root of many troubling aspects of our country and our lives. In this speech I want to talk about how we might live consciously, to be conscious of how we relate to one another, the world we live in and the opportunities we share.

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Meditation: because in order to change the circumstance for those vulnerable in our communities we need to all imagine something different, aspire to and be encouraged by what we see and feel, and participate in those things that help our senses come alive.

Finally I want to focus on *Magnificence*, on being the best we can be so that we can create, and co-create with others, opportunities that change the status quo for individuals, families, communities and nations.

After all:

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, "Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?" Actually, who are you *not* to be? Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. When we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others

From the most life-sapping, controlling, colonising, organised mode of oppression that threatens not only those who experience disadvantage, but all of us in the room, and all life as we know it.

I did a doctorate in human ecology, a trans-discipline that draws on, creates and sustains contexts of diversity. From within this position, I have come to understand the primary threat to our future, and the future of our children, comes from a mode of thought which depends on centralising and monopolising power and control that is the antithesis of diversity – and what Indian physicist and activist Vandana Shiva has termed "Monoculture of the Mind":

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The monoculture of the mind treats all diversity as disease, and creates coercive structures to model this biologically and culturally diverse world of ours on the privileged categories and concepts of one class, one race and one gender of a single species.

Monocultures have created a violent world order, since violence is intrinsic to the project of transforming diverse, self-organising systems in nature and in society into centrally controlled uniformity and homogeneity. Monocultured thinking destroys diversity and legitimizes that destruction as progress, growth and improvement.

Monocultures spread not because they produce more, but because they control more. The expansion of monocultures had more to do with politics and power than with enriching and enhancing systems of biological production. Ecologically, monocultures lead to erosion of the earth's resources and pollution of land, water and the atmosphere. Politically this creates centralised control and authoritarian structures. Cultivating and conserving diversity is no luxury in our times. It is a survival imperative, and the precondition for the freedom of all, the big and the small, and the only mode by which sustainability, justice and peace can be attained.

This is why I am concerned with malaise. At the commencement of the 21st Century, I know we are looking to secure our economic, environmental, social and cultural futures in an unprecedented period of change in the world. Achievements in science, technology, industry, commerce and finance have brought humans into a new age at the expense of much of the diversity of life and life enhancing processes across the world. Demographically, we have the largest number of adolescents in the history of our species, many of whom are living in poverty. India and China are becoming the most powerful, technologically advanced countries in the world. Globalised, multinational companies have budgets bigger than some countries. Our country is at war. That we are in the midst of crisis is now well understood. Not only do we have to consider international and Asia-

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Pacific regional issues in our deliberations, but domestic issues as well. In Australia, it appears that natural and cultural diversity is not viewed as a source of wealth, nor a resource for modernity, nor for current political models. Indeed, even within the 700,000 people who are First Peoples in Australia, we find it difficult to view our own diversity with the respect it deserves, let alone get respect from others.

Australia is governed by a federal parliament that has only one Aboriginal member. We see a system of service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – by governments at both the federal and state levels – that still struggles to deliver the most basic of services that benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We see a system with too many bureaucrats who do not see themselves as accountable to our people or as having responsibilities to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people benefit from their efforts, and we have seen limited engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the setting of policy and programs.

We are still not all fully engaged with a system of a ‘real economy’, nor do some of us live in places where a buoyant market economy exists. Our life expectancy, whilst improving, is happening at a glacial pace. We are not all benefitting from the delivery of education, our own knowledge systems are still marginalised and we sadly remain over-represented in judicial and child protection systems.

These systemic issues are themselves indicators of crisis, subject to data and statistics. Less measurable but no less profound is the impact of a sapping of confidence in and by our communities – a nagging fear that the decline is inevitable, and that the next generation must lower its sights. A subtle message is inherent in it: “Give up before it hurts too much”. These and other circumstances are unacceptable and form part of the reasoning why we need to challenge.

In this century, our challenges will be new. Instruments with which we meet these challenges may be new. But those values upon which our traditional societies were built and upon which our success as

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countrymen and women depend – creativity and innovation, discipline and community, honesty and hard work, courage and fair play, tolerance and curiosity, loyalty and love of country – these things are old. These things are true. They have given hope to those even when there was no hope apparent. These values have underpinned our resilience when all other indicators suggested we should falter. What is demanded then is a return to the truth and the certainty of these values.

These values contain in them the responsibilities and a recognition, on the part of every Australian, that we have duties to ourselves, as First Peoples, and as a nation, duties of which Barack Obama said in his inauguration speech: "We do not grudgingly accept but rather seize gladly, firm in the knowledge that there is nothing so satisfying to the spirit, so defining of our character, than giving our all to a difficult task". We who assume leadership roles in our communities and organizations know probably more than most that this is the price and the promise of citizenship. We know that the challenges we face as a First People are real. They are serious and they are many. But these challenges are not ours alone. What I am afraid for is that all of us are just as vulnerable to the violence of monocultures of the mind.

Some of us have seen horrific things done to children, tolerated horrific things being done to our fellow Australians; to other beings we share this life journey with; and in nature. Horrible things that are sanctioned and justified in monocultured thinking and action. Perhaps these things have made you stop and think about 'progress' but you have felt powerless in the face of it; or frightened of the consequences of intervening, and while frustrated, maybe you have come to understand and accept that horror as inevitable, and swallowed a very bitter pill indeed.

But this does not have to be the case. Conferences such as this are celebrating the clawing back the reclaiming of who we are, and who we can be given the opportunity. Not everyone in this audience, or in other audiences I have addressed, will have the pleasure of being an artist or

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poet, a doctor or teacher. Not everyone will know the simple beauty of love, either given or received. It is a truth, however, that everyone will come upon some form of hardship, of pain and struggle, of adversity. In fact for some of us, it is the only constant in this life. We will all make decisions that affect ourselves, those close to us, and possibly even following generations.

It is during these times of adversity that we turn to people who command leadership, and marshal resources with great effect. All of our leaders at this time in history will need to have integrity, determination, charisma, vision, technical and interpersonal expertise, adaptability, and even the often-overlooked quality of being an experienced follower. All these characteristics are crucial to helping us deal with and successfully come through this particular time of adversity.

And times are adverse. In my own communities, we see that there are many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who find themselves in poverty and who might find my assertions of leadership outside of their realm of influence. For some people, poverty is what they live and breathe and I am not just talking about financial poverty. I am also talking about being impoverished culturally, linguistically, time poor, isolated, without love, women growing up children with out partners, educationally impoverished, children growing up in institutions rather than in the care of a family.... There are many ways to be impoverished. Poverty is a human rights issue after all. Some of us can move out of that circumstance, some of us will die in it.

And whilst our effort should be to engage with and direct resources to people in poverty, we do have cause for celebration. Among our number are professors, lawyers, barristers, judges, teachers, health workers, doctors, nurses, academics, politicians, dancers, athletes, public servants, people who are trained in governance, business, entrepreneurial thinkers and actors. We have people in decision-making and powerful positions. We have chief executives, chairmen and women, we have marine biologists, social scientists, rangers,

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researchers, we have people working in corrections, youth agencies as lecturers, representing us locally, nationally and internationally. We have done our teething in health, education, academia, natural resource management, in regional autonomy, leadership development, organizational management, youth empowerment, media marketing and public policy, land purchasing, business development, economic development, human rights and political strategy. Some of us have been in our fields for at least 20 years and are in positions to mentor others. We are the emergent leadership. We are modern intellectuals with ancestral and cultural connection to country. And we will be taken notice of.

This type of leadership is now critical for all of our affairs. Because the issues affecting our health and wellbeing are globalised and localized. Make no mistake, what we face together as humanity are complex survival problems that threaten our very existence and no one discipline, person, group, culture or political affiliation has the answer we need. Monocultures make diversity disappear from perception, and consequently from the world. One of the most dangerous mindsets we have is the one which erases diversity – which erases alternatives, and gives rise to the ‘there is no alternative’ syndrome. How often in contemporary times has there been a total uprooting of nature, of communities and entire civilisations been justified on the grounds that there is no alternative? We know that alternatives do exist, but are excluded; but their inclusion requires a context of diversity.

We cannot predict what happens, nor can we yet know now what we are capable of. But I do believe that Indigenous peoples across the planet, and the first peoples of this country, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, hold part of the answer for our human condition. You, of course, hold the other part of that answer. What we must do together is create occasions to change the way we imagine, interrogate the circumstances of, and care for each other.

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And so, what can we – must we – do together to move beyond the malaise, what can we do to take on the awesome responsibility of living up to the opportunity of our existence? What can we do to promote a future for us all in this country and the world? What happens when we meditate on what needs to happen?

So to the next part of the speech, meditation. Now, how can you reclaim community and say we are ‘alright Jack’ through acts of meditation? Meditation is for me, the practice of mindfulness, the force of imagination that can bring something into being.

I meditate on peace and freedom for all sentient beings. I meditate that we might all reclaim our voice and vision, I meditate on quantum science, that provides evidence that we are all, at a subatomic level, deeply and profoundly connected. That there is no separation between us; and in fact that separation is a matter of perception.

I meditate on the fact that my community extends beyond my human realm, that it is physical and non-physical, I spend a lot of time meditating on impermanence – having been rolled out of two jobs in the past two years and experiencing unemployment with big mortgages encourages me to do so! I meditate on the constancy of change, of love, and on what and who I can and can’t change. I meditate on the decisions I have to make. I meditate when I drive to work – often acquiring many speeding tickets as a result, then I meditate on the bill and I meditate with resentment whilst making a voluntary contribution to tax!!!

But mostly I meditate that we might change our relationship with the Earth community. I contemplate all the Earth’s processes that make our life possible, I meditate on the Earth as a beautiful blue and green orb in the darkness of space, and I spend a lot of time meditating upon our place in the Universe and what it means to be members of the Universe community.

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Sometimes I meditate to just remember how to breathe. I meditate to get through the stress of my everyday life, and find that it centres me. I would hope that you might meditate on your life, on your experiences, on the experience of people around you; on the life you live on the world you occupy and the life beings with whom you share your life.

Meditation helps you build your resolve. I want to share with you what I have resolved to do in this the next phase of my life. These five strategies are absolutely about reclaiming community – my primary community, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia. However, I have structured these so that they might touch your life too. The first four strategies are necessarily focused on the Australian context, the last is a globally focused concern.

The first strategy is in two parts, and enables a context of diversity from which to progress sustainability, justice and peace. The first part of this strategy involves all of us becoming aware of the rights and enacting the responsibilities contained in the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This affirms that Indigenous peoples are equal to all others, recognises the right to be different and to be respected as such. The Declaration affirms that all peoples contribute to the diversity and richness of civilisations and cultures which constitute the common heritage of human kind, and recognises that we should be free from discrimination of any kind, that we have a right to development in accordance with our own needs and wishes, and a right to constructive arrangements with the States in which we live.

The Declaration was developed to enhance harmonious and cooperative relations between the State and Indigenous peoples, based on principles of justice, democracy, respect for human rights, non-discrimination and good faith. The articles contained in the Declaration are a standard of achievement to be pursued in a spirit of partnership and mutual respect.

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What is at the heart of this Declaration is a principle of 'diversity'; Indigenous peoples are able to live diverse lives, self-determining lives, free from discrimination. So, if these are our rights, how must we respond?

The first we must do is regain our respect for diversity in all its forms and rid ourselves of a way of thinking and acting that makes diversity disappear from our perception. Every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person in this country could pick up the Declaration and participate in dialogues about what this means for our lives; get the Declaration off our shelves and take the articles into our day-to-day lived experience. Discuss these rights with young people who are in care, on trial, using drugs, homeless; our mob who have to constantly put their case before some caseworker in some office, somewhere.

Talk to single mothers and fathers, our Elders and our organisations. The National Congress of Australia's First Peoples and the Australian Human Rights Commission are about to embark on a countrywide tour to facilitate some of these dialogues, but why wait? As part of these dialogues inform parents, families, and nations; have dialogues with our fellow Australians about their roles and responsibilities in relation to these rights, teach them how to enact them. Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to negotiate with uncaring others about their rights, support them achieving their rights, be a role model on what it means to have these rights, and enact them in a way appropriate to our integrity as peoples and as nations of peoples.

The second part of this first strategy is to support, facilitate, assist all my fellow Australians to shift into a context of diversity by engaging with and committing to a Yes vote in a referendum which recognises the status and contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Constitution of this country.

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First Peoples in Australia are inestimably precious; our culture, languages and heritage can and should generate pride in us all. Great things happen when the populous is moved to do something great, to change the course of history, to hold true to the principles of democracy and recognise both equality and diversity. We have the chance to adhere to these principles by changing the constitution of Australia to both further the outcomes achieved for Indigenous Australians in 1967 and to finally recognise that our country is made up of old and new Australians, and show the rest of the world our maturity as a nation.

Strategy 2: Address the 'deficit' language in health

The second strategy that I will invest my time is necessarily concerned with language. My friend Dr. Rosemary Aldrich examined speeches and documents delivered by federal politicians from 1972 to 2000 and found two things: firstly, that four key ideas about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people pervade official conversations;¹. These four ideas concern frames of control and responsibility; capacity and competence; the nature of the problem; and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as 'not us' or 'other'.

Secondly, Dr Aldrich found that the policies enacted by these federal politicians have been consistent with these four key ideas. If language used in the policy environment represents Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as not competent, irresponsible, the source or cause of the problem and 'not us' then it is no wonder that policy emerging from that environment entrenches a limited view of us, denigrates what we are able to achieve within our communities and together as equals, and makes us an acceptable loss in the mission to modernise and globalise Australia².

¹ New Matilda, 2007 The Language of the Intervention.

² Ibid.



We use language to factor in acceptable loss into most of the affairs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people every single day. I have heard people say in all phases of project or program implementation or in the development of policy positions: “Don’t worry about the drunks, you need to worry about the kids”; “But don’t worry about the kids who have foetal alcohol syndrome, only worry about those we can get to do well in school”; “Don’t focus your attention on old people, focus on the 0-4 year old age group”. Investing in all children is thought to give Australia a bigger economic and societal return than investing in Elders. Constructing older people as the acceptable loss is only permissible in a society that favours the young, and is not conceivable in societies founded on Elder wisdom traditions and principles.

Another way we frame acceptable loss, particularly in health, is through stereotypes and prejudices: “Aboriginal people won’t care about aged care services, most of them die when they are young anyway”; “Young Aboriginal women are supposed to have children when they are teenagers – it’s cultural” and a thousand other ways in which our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander society is compartmentalized into acceptable and unacceptable. What is not deemed acceptable is not fundable, is not resourced, and becomes the acceptable loss.

One example of how these discourses directly affect health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can be found in an analysis of policy frameworks that emphasise and focus program implementation and resources on women, often to the exclusion of men. Child and maternal health is an area where we focus on the biological aspects of the mother’s health, as a carrier of the child to ensure optimal health outcomes. By not acknowledging the social role of men as fathers, and the quality of the relationships between men and women that will ultimately affect the quality of life for the child, we frame men in a policy implementation context – men as the acceptable loss.

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Our society loses because the roles and responsibilities of men are absent and not valued – they are not seen as worthy contributors to our own, or Australian society. What our men then lose is an appreciation for their capacity for nurturance and their position as heads of our households. This absence shakes the very foundations of our families and communities to the ground – the absence in policy and programs falsifies gender roles and responsibilities in our communities, and accomplishes the colonial mission that was started over 200 years ago.

I am working with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics on projects that specifically look at deficit language and the framing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This seems to be a good place to put this strategy deep in the ground. First Peoples want to have the conversations about this framing, the University is well positioned to ensure these conversations take place and ultimately respond.

Strategy 3: Creation of alternatives

The third strategy I want to focus on is the creation of alternatives, using knowledges that sit outside of monocultures and capture the proliferation of ideas and actions used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and those other Australians who have situated themselves outside of the mainstream. There is an enormous healing and excitement in this space, and we bloody need excitement, yes we do.

Now it is too hard for me to simplify and stereotype and amplify the negatives of our community so it distorts the reality of how many of us live our lives. But the reality is too that for a great number of people in our community, life is grim. Life is such that some children would choose to end their lives, even before they get a chance to live it. Life is such that we have young people who have completed year 12 but whom are unable to read or write. Despite our best efforts we as a nation have not come together in ways that solve challenges like healthcare, or

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education, or the need to find well-paying jobs for every Australian.

What we, the people, need to do is be willing to find meaning in something greater than our individual effort alone; not for profit, not for personal gain, but because we value who we are, where we have come from, and all we can be, given the opportunity. Therefore I will not try to find alternatives to comparing Indigenous with non-Indigenous peoples. This makes your way of thinking and acting the norm, and I don't accept this as a central tenet in the way I live my life. I don't reject it, but I don't accept it entirely.

Because, what if the unbroken mission of Indigenous Australians became what needed to be accomplished by all Australians? What would happen if the mission for caring for country, of knowing it intimately, of placing your feet in the footsteps of your father, also showed you the way to become a man? What would happen if the mission of Indigenous Australians to maintain the universe and all that lives in it in harmony, what would happen if people could accomplish the mission of reproducing their societies within the limits of the ecosystems to which they are intimately a part? What would happen if your mission was to sing the sun up in the morning, if your mission was to assist with rites of passage rituals, if you were the keeper of the knowledge of all the species of all things that you share your life with? What if your mission was a spiritual one, framed, refined and evolved over 60 thousand years? What would Australia look like then?

Strategy 4: Invest in a wealthy middle class

The fourth strategy is about investing in a wealthy middle class. We have a growing number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professionals in decision-making roles across professions, government and industry, and a higher education sector is growing in their appreciation of the world views and perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

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Enabling more Indigenous people to gain access to higher education and better long term intergenerational wealth will require a range of strategies for those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families facing complex challenges that, while often linked to low socio-economic status, also go beyond such status for many Indigenous families. But achieving a middle class is fundamental to the continuation of our cultures, our languages and our future. Yes, we should be focusing on professional groups. But what we do not invest in enough is business, entrepreneurship, and we do not incubate innovation. And we will have in the next few years our first cohort of independently wealthy millionaires through the Supply Nation, through businesses that contract to multinational companies and through royalties. There will in the next decade opportunities with new technologies, new apps, new jobs in fields not yet imagined.

We need access to more start up monies. We need ILC and IBA to invest in entrepreneurs. We need to tell kids that drop out of high school that they are just like Richard Branson; foster curiosity and entrepreneurial zeal when we first recognise it; invest in a middle class and in our millionaires. I am the first female Torres Strait islander professor, I want to be the first Torres Strait Islander philanthropist.

From this point, when you are doing more than just surviving, when you can bring a populous into wealth at the same time, when a collective view of generating wealth is taken, then cultural reinvestment occurs. People start taking language lessons, learn and practice dance, take pride in themselves, in their nations, invest in the future of their children and this country in ways that benefit us all.

Strategy 5: EcoHealth

The fifth strategy is to promote care for 'other than human' to take an ecosystems approach to life and living. This strategy is globally focused and locally realised, taking the view that ecology and the health of all

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species are interrelated and is at the nexus of ecosystem sustainability, resilience and health – for humans and all species. The survival of humans and animals depends on the way we manage our relationships in these eco-systems. The interrelationships between ecosystems and health pose practical and philosophical issues that can be complex, perplexing and challenging. These challenges call upon our best science, clearest thinkers, and thoughtful actions to explore new ways of working together beyond traditional boundaries of research, policy and practice. This to me is the heartland of every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person, a transdisciplinary space in which we can move outside of those discourses that are fixed and immovable, into creative, synergist thinking and flow.

I offer these five strategies to do what I have always done, to extend the opportunity and care, dignity and hope to the Indigenous people of Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I know, as others do here in this room, of justice denied, of consciousness, of actions that are morally indefensible and a stain on the history of this nation. I hope that you might heed a call to open our hearts and minds to the commonalities we have; to this shared, if tragic, history; to the common things that need to be done.

I believe deeply that we cannot solve the challenges of our times unless we solve them together – we have different stories, but we hold common hopes; that we may not look the same and we may not have come from the same place, but we all want to move in the same direction – toward a better future for our children and grandchildren.

In the third, final part of this address I said I wanted to focus on magnificence, on who we are when we let our light shine. I will share some signposts that mark the journey toward a union so needed in this country, one in which we take responsibility to contribute and invite the contribution of others. This union then mitigates against any group of people being the ‘acceptable loss’ for the greater good. Evoking

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magnificence in our society therefore requires a deep appreciation of the necessity for diverse thinking, and of competence in co-creating an environment that is safe and accepting on the one hand and honest and challenging on the other.

The first signpost is the support of work being done by the peak agencies in Australia, of which there are many, in health, land rights, housing, child protection, and on other emergent issues. These agencies have supported their membership with the development of key policies and issues papers.

The second signpost will be the encouragement of a cross-agency/portfolio approach to particular issues. I, for example, would be interested to see how the issue of teenage pregnancy could be better dealt with. The negative incentives are very powerful: the receipt of baby money, the lack of buoyant market economies, the transitions between year 10 and 11 and year 12 and university or employment, access to public housing and a higher amount of money in the welfare payments, entrapment, the way young people are socialized, the use of alcohol and drugs, young women's empowerment, sexual education and reproductive health all contribute to these negative incentives being taken advantage of. What could happen if members invested in health, housing, education, land rights, economic development, traditional owners, parents, and young people could dialogue around this and other issues? What would then happen if we were inclusive of the diversity of people's lived experiences and were able to express what should happen in these instances with clarity, opportunity and purpose? Who would listen to our collective voice and enable that collective action? Would you?

History is governed by those overarching moments that give shape and meaning to life by relating human venture to the larger destinies of the planet. Creating such a work might be called the great work of a people. Each of us has our own individual life pattern and responsibilities. Yet beyond these concerns each person, in and through their personal work,

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contributes to the great work. We cannot doubt that we have been given the intellectual vision, the spiritual insight and even the physical resources we need for carrying out the transition that is demanded in these times. Mutual enhancement is the vision for our future. It is a long-term proposition and there is much great work to be done.

In the end, then, what is called for is nothing more, and nothing less, than what all the world's great religions demand – that we do unto others as we would have them do unto us. Let us be our brother's keeper, Scripture tells us. Let us be our sister's keeper. Let us find that common stake we all have in one another, and let our politics reflect that spirit as well.

For we have a choice in this country.

It is not enough to give health care to the sick, or jobs to the jobless, or education to our children. But it is where we start. It is where our union grows stronger, that is where the perfection begins.

But regardless of what combination of policies and proposals get us to this goal, we must reach it. We must act. And we must act boldly. Leaders no longer have a reason to be timid. And Australia can no longer afford inaction. That's not who we are – and that's not the story of our nation's improbable progress.

Never forget that we have it within our power to shape history in this country. That is what I love the most about our community. We never forget the lessons of those who teach and help us lead, and it is not in our character to sit idly by as a victim of fate or circumstance. For we are a people of action and innovation, forever pushing the boundaries of what's possible. Now is the time to push those boundaries once more.

Thank you so much for listening, have a wonderful conference, go well, be magnificent!

