

# Sorry ...

## Sorry, yes, and now for a fair go

**K**evin Rudd and the new federal parliament are to be commended for the long overdue apology to Aboriginal Australians. Accepting the mistakes of the past is an important step on the way to ensuring that Aborigines receive the same social dividend as all Australians. It is important that 'sorry' is a beginning, an acceptance that so much remains to be done.

We were taught in primary school that Truganini was the 'last' Tasmanian Aborigine and that theirs was a 'primitive' culture. In later years we learned about the importance of the Midlothian coalfields and memorised mnemonics to enable recall of the names of Plantagenet kings. The catastrophic effect on Aborigines of European invasion was rarely, if ever, mentioned.

It was decades later that I became aware of Manarlargenna, Eumarrah and Tongerlongeter and of the rich culture of a people who had made Tasmania their home for so many millennia. (See 'Tunnerminnerwait, the waterbird, calls no more', p. 29.) Tragically, much of the culture of the first Tasmanians has been lost, but there is now much greater awareness of the importance of saving everything that can be saved.

Whatever it costs and whatever it takes, the price must be paid to ensure that Aborigines reach the same levels of health, education and fulfilment as everyone else.

I cannot support the notion of a separate Aboriginal state or apartheid in any form. Our future can only lie in travelling together as Australians. Every one of us must have an equal opportunity to enjoy and benefit from the cultural richness that is available to us whether the first group arrived here 40,000 years ago or whether your grandparents arrived from Greece in 1947. I reckon it's time to invoke that great Australian contribution to the world – the notion of 'a fair go' no matter which mob you come from.

'Sorry' is a start and an opportunity. The electorate will expect much more progress than in the past.



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