



New South Wales
Aboriginal Education
Consultative Group Inc.

MEMORIES OF SPECIAL EVENTS, OLD FRIENDS & LONG ADMIRED COLLEAGUES.

Words by Professor Bob Morgan, Inaugural AECG President

To break the stress and boredom of the COVID lockdown I ventured out onto the golf course yesterday for the first time in months observing of course strict social distancing rules. But today, during this the 8th week of my pandemic lockdown, my mind and heart turns to the memories of some special events and of old education friends and colleagues who I've been privileged to tread a few paths with over the years. One special event involves my time as the inaugural President of the reformed NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (NSWAECG) and of the special people, who metaphorically and literally, danced through life with me. We had some great times. Their friendship, wisdom and love enriched our journey.

I will focus mainly on events and people who I shared heady days with during my time as the President of the revamped NSWAECG. Many of the people, whose memory often visits me bringing with them warmth to an aging Septuagenarian soul, have now passed but their love, wisdom and support will comfort me until the end of my days. I offer my reflections because some of the material that I have read about the history of the NSWAECG mistakenly reports, reframes or reinterprets the early days that led to the reconstituting and restructuring of the organisation. I don't suggest that there is any malice in this oversight, rather it a possible level of misunderstanding or a lack of knowledge of what really happened so I will try and put the record straight.

It is hard work trying to convince politicians and bureaucrats of the need for change but we achieved it because we had an empathetic Minister for education, a couple of bureaucrats that stepped aside and walked with us rather than in front of us and the people who were elected to lead did so because they were empowered and committed to a common cause. We worked hard, sometimes well into the night, but we always seemed to have fun along the way too. One story I fondly recall is when we took one of the early state meetings to Wilcannia. After the first day of meeting the local community decided to host a BBQ out on country for us and they decided to serve up some bush tucker. An emu was killed and stripped of its feathers - I can still see it propped up against a tree - before it was tossed on the coals. Well anyway we sat around with the locals and after the emu was cooked, we all lined up for our share. Some of the non-Aboriginal people who were attending the meeting also joined in. The next day, about an hour before the meeting was due to start, there was a knock on my motel door and a number of the members told me that they had diarrhoea and asked if we could delay the meeting until the afternoon. I too was suffering but I didn't let on and faking disappointment I reluctantly agreed to delay the start of the meeting. As we often did, we made up for lost time by working into the night but I'll always remember the time that the Dinawan (there are multiple spellings) had its revenge.



New South Wales
Aboriginal Education
Consultative Group Inc.

MEMORIES OF SPECIAL EVENTS, OLD FRIENDS & LONG ADMIRED COLLEAGUES.

Words by Professor Bob Morgan, Inaugural AECG President

The AECG wasn't always the community elected organisation that it is today. Before it was revamped, the AECG was a committee comprised of Aboriginal members who were appointed by the NSW Department of Education. During the late 1970s I was a member of the now defunct National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC) and I was invited to join the departmentally appointed AECG. I felt uneasy about the invitation and instead convinced my mate Chubby Hall, who had just completed his teacher training at Armidale CAE, to join the committee instead.



Bill kept calling me and I eventually agreed to attend a meeting of the committee. The meeting was held in the offices of Aboriginal Hostels somewhere near Sydney Town Hall and after listening for a while I was asked if I would like to join. I told the group that I was troubled by the fact that Bill was chairing the committee and that I was also concerned about the 'advisory' nature of the AECG.

Bill Rose was the Assistant Director of Special Programs within the NSW Department of Education and this is where Aboriginal education was situated. Bill chaired and was obviously in charge of the AECG as it was then structured. Bill later became a valued friend and colleague, but during his time with the original AECG he definitely had a major controlling role. John Heath who was at one time the nominal Chair of the AECG and who worked with Bill tells me that he was forced out of the position because he asked too many questions and challenged the advisory role of the committee. Vince Hall and Chubby who were also members at various times and have similar memories.



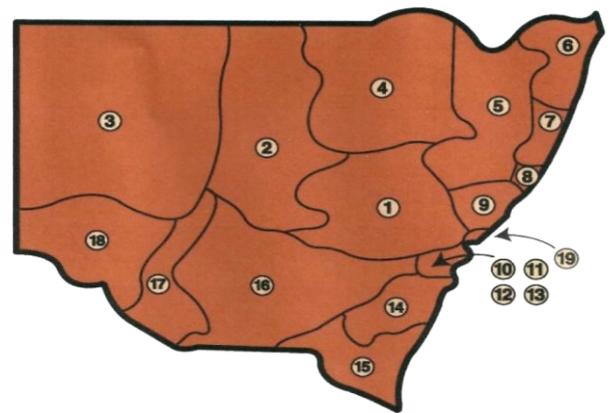


New South Wales
Aboriginal Education
Consultative Group Inc.

MEMORIES OF SPECIAL EVENTS, OLD FRIENDS & LONG ADMIRED COLLEAGUES.

Words by Professor Bob Morgan, Inaugural AECG President

After explaining my reluctance to join the committee, I was asked how the organisation could be different and after sharing some ideas I was asked to prepare a paper which the committee consider at the next meeting. The short story is that I had long talks with my mates Chubby Hall and John Lester about the idea for a regionally based and community elected organisation and together we drafted a paper that essentially argued the need for a community based and elected organisation. I presented the paper to the AECG members and Bill at their next meeting and to my surprise the new recommended community based and elected structure was endorsed. Bill undoubtedly shepherded the new model through the departmental maze, probably with the support of the Director of Special Programs, Jack Harrison and the then Minister of Education, Paul Landa, was obviously supportive of our claim to education self-determination.



Region 1 - Western 1
Region 2 - Western 2
Region 3 - Western 3
Region 4 - North West 1
Region 5 - North West 2
Region 6 - Upper North Coast
Region 7 - Lower North Coast
Region 8 - Manning
Region 9 - Hunter
Region 10 - Met. East

Region 11 - Met. North
Region 12 - Met. West
Region 13 - Met. South West
Region 14 - Upper South Coast
Region 15 - Lower South Coast
Region 16 - Riverina 1
Region 17 - Riverina 2
Region 18 - Riverina 3
Region 19 - Central Coast

John Lester later became the executive officer of the revamped organisation and Chub took on the role of chair. Both had key roles in the development of the new organisation and John as the EO was critical during the early years of its operation. Pat Cavanagh also provided invaluable research skills and education advice during this period and we were fortunate to have recruited some great admin staff including Gaye Allen and Jenny Kerr who edited *Pemulwuy*, the NSWAECC newsletter. Tragically Jenny was killed in a car accident a few years ago but along with my mate Bill Harrison I did get to visit her in Nowra a few months before her accident.



New South Wales
Aboriginal Education
Consultative Group Inc.

MEMORIES OF SPECIAL EVENTS, OLD FRIENDS & LONG ADMIRED COLLEAGUES.

Words by Professor Bob Morgan, Inaugural AECG President

The planned restructure of the NSWAECCG involved extensive travel and community meetings throughout the state but due to an accident that I sustained after falling down some stairs, it fell to Chub and John to do the trips. During this time, I was working with Pat O'Shane on the Keane Report. I fell down some stairs at parliament house and ended up in RPAH for a couple of weeks so I was out of action with a back injury.

Even though the new structure had been endorsed, community meetings needed to be held to promote the concept and to elect people to serve as regional members. We had no funding but as a member of the NAEC I was to fund from the Commonwealth Dept of Education (CDE) which allowed the community meetings to proceed. The support of CDE staff such as Evan Sutton and Garnett Evans, Liz Joyce, Val Mallet and Mary-Rose McGrath, under the leadership of then NSW CDE Director Geoff Green, was critical to the early days of the revamped NSWAECCG. They were all good people and great supporters of Aboriginal education who helped to make things happen for us. Other people who were instrumental in supporting our education goals and our right to self-determination during the early transformative days include Jane Kirton and Margaret Cranney. Trevor Cook and Ken Jones who worked with the NSW Department of Ed also helped along the way.

Some of the community people, those I can remember, who were part of the early days of the revamped NSWAECCG include Jimmy French from Moree, our court jester, Olive Mitchell from Dareton in the Riverina, Aunty Evelyn Crawford from Brewarrina, (awarded a well-deserved Hon Doctorate by CSU) Ann Thomas, from Wallaga Lake, Jim Stanley from Wellington, Bertha Kapeen from Ballina, Beryl Carmichael from Menindee, Bill Newman from Narromine, Marlene Clark-Hoskins, from the Riverina, John Heath, from the Hunter, Jenny Fraser, from the Central Coast, Ruth Simms, from Nowra, Joyce Woodberry, from La Perouse, and Muriel Hoskins- Vale from Kempsey. Lifelong friends including Margaret Campbell, Nerida Blair, Norma and Millie Ingram, Ian Perdrisat, Delma Davidson, Laurel Williams, Peter Schnierer, Bill Harrison, Delma Davidson, Lynette Riley, Beau Thorne, and Linda Burney were all critical to creating a voice for change. Linda was elected to replace me when I decided to step down from the President's position. Who can ever forget Schnierer's Raiders? A group of people gathered together under the leadership of Peter Schnierer who helped develop NSWAECCG policy statements and position papers. There are so many more to acknowledge and some of you will know who they are. My apologies to those I might have overlooked. I share some photo below, a couple I could quickly find, to remind us of those special days. If others have photos or memories please post.



New South Wales
Aboriginal Education
Consultative Group Inc.

MEMORIES OF SPECIAL EVENTS, OLD FRIENDS & LONG ADMIRED COLLEAGUES.

Words by Professor Bob Morgan, Inaugural AECG President

A number of these wonderful people have sadly passed now but their memory and the change they helped create is undoubtedly the basis for the advances in education experience and outcomes that our people enjoy today. We're not quite there but change has been made.

A few of these names are well known but most work behind the scenes to influence change and it is often these people, those who lead from behind, that are the true heroes in any movement. Perhaps it is the natural consequence of generational change or maybe it is something entirely different that explains why there seems to be little knowledge of, and dare I say, respect for those who fight the hard battles that create the opportunities enjoyed in today's 'modern' world.

No gain in our rights and freedoms has ever been obtained without struggle. Even a cursory view of the historical struggles led by people such as Fred Maynard, William Ferguson and Jack Patten, Pearl Gibbs, and Charlie Perkins show how tough it was. And those who were at the forefront of the Redfern movement of the 1970s, including Mum Shirl, Chicka Dixon, Fred Hollows, Paul Coe, Sol & Bob Bellear, Naomi Mayers, Garry Foley, Isobel Coe, Billy Craigie and others, each in their own way made a difference.

Those interested in this history are encouraged to check out Gary Foley's excellent kooriweb webpage at: <http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/indexb.html> Gary was always the articulate intellectual, a truly gifted thinker and nothing has changed over the years. Disappointingly when I did some work with Clarke Scott and a group of Aboriginal boys from around Penrith a few years ago, one of the exercises I did with them was to ask them if they knew any of the names of some of those mentioned above, sadly none of them knew any of the people and what they stood for. I've done something similar with some Aboriginal university students and I've had the same result. Sadly, some of the young ones know little of our history and mistakenly believe that what exist today is how it's always been. Perhaps we are not telling our stories well enough or maybe they should be part of education history taught in our schools.

There were many special people who stepped up to be part of the NSWAECCG in the early days and Joyce Woodberry was one of these special people. Joyce brought passion and compassion into our meetings/gatherings and because she was such a forceful voice for Aboriginal kids attending Catholic schools, we affectionately called her Sister Joyce. Sadly, we lost Joyce way too early but her spirit, and that of the others who stood for and did good, will always shine strong. This piece is dedicated to the memory of all those who have passed and those who have worked hard to create long denied opportunities.



New South Wales
Aboriginal Education
Consultative Group Inc.

MEMORIES OF SPECIAL EVENTS, OLD FRIENDS & LONG ADMIRED COLLEAGUES.

Words by Professor Bob Morgan, Inaugural AECG President



Figure 2 Evelyn Crawford of Brewarrina, NSW (photo: John Meredith 1994), image number: nla.pic-an 14320677

The senior women of those early years were exceptional and demonstrated what dignified leadership is all about. Aunty Evelyn was the matriarch of our group and in 1993 she was awarded an Order of Australia (OA). She gifted me the pin that comes with the award telling me that she was proud of what I was doing for Aboriginal education and she wanted to share part of her award with me. Aunty Evelyn's special gift and the sentiment behind it really moved me and you can imagine how I felt when it was stolen, (along with a box of a lot of other stuff) when someone broke into my place when I was living in Brighton Le Sands during the late 1990s .

The NSW AECG is still going strong after all these years even though some people have contacted me to claim, in their view, that the organisation is now comprised mainly of people who are employed by the NSW Department of Education, and in their view, this is seen as a return to the old days when the Department appointed people. Whether this is true or not I will leave to others to ponder but I have in fact had people tell me at NSW AECG state meetings that they would never dare say anything to challenge the school they work with or the department because as employees they had to work with the school when they returned to their communities after attending AECG meetings.

Whatever the current realities, it doesn't diminish the important work that many people have and continue to do to provide a voice in education for our people. This voice has been responsible for many important Aboriginal education reforms. In 1982 when I was an Education Commissioner and President of the NSW AECG, the NSW Aboriginal Education Policy, the first of its kind in Australia, was released and I commented: *"For too long, generations of Aborigines have failed to gain full value of the benefits of education in a social system that undervalues their heritage and does not support them in the preservation of their culture. It is hoped that, through education, future generations, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, will be able to exist in a society where one culture is not subservient to any other. We must hope, for a people without hope are a people without a future."*



New South Wales
Aboriginal Education
Consultative Group Inc.

MEMORIES OF SPECIAL EVENTS, OLD FRIENDS & LONG ADMIRER COLLEAGUES.

Words by Professor Bob Morgan, Inaugural AECG President

Four decades since the release of the NSW Aboriginal Education Policy I still hold firmly to the objectives and ideals identified in the original policy and I continue to work with schools, universities and other institutions to help pursue the educational equity that so many have worked so hard to achieve. Progress has been made of course, but so much more is required.

As shared earlier, some of the warriors of the early days of the reformed NSWAECEG have now passed but their memories and their dedication to Aboriginal education equity and justice should serve to motivate and inspire our ongoing demand for our right to culturally affirming and intellectually enriching education.