1 COMING TOGETHER 1993.at Newcastle Foreshore.

To Koorie Elders,Koories,Lord Mayor and Non Koories. My name is Stan Masterson and I have the great privilege to present the HUNTER COMMITMENT TO INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS to the KOORIE ELDERS present here at this Coming Together Day on the foreshore of Newcastle Harbour.
This site I believe is of special significance to Koories as it is one of the stepping stones of the mythical creature PUT TI KAN which bounded over the river mouth in the Awabakal Dreamtime.

It also has some significance to me as it is where I spent many years of my earlier working life in the power station that used to be here but has now vanished into history and today you would never know that it existed but it has not been erased from my memory.
It is also significant to us all because Lt. Shortland landed near here in 1797 pursuing convicts who had escaped from Port Jackson and whose place a lot of Koories were destined to replace as a source of cheap labour after you were beaten into submission by a ruthless genocide employing the most shameful means.

We may ask why the need for a coming together day, well the Newcastle Aboriginal Support Group back in February of this year decided on a Hunter groundwork Treaty as a desirable goal in the U.N.Year of the Worlds Indigenous Peoples. This was not to be a legal document but a way of focusing of awareness at grassroots level that might lead to a regional agreement and which could inspire developments at a national level. After many meetings, workshops and discussions with Koories the outcome was the document which we felt the white community would support and sign at this point of time.

This year the U.N. Year of Worlds Indigenous Peoples when great gains should have been made between black and white Australians, the process of reconciliation has been damaged.
This has arisen from the opposition to the Mabo high court decision in June 1992 and the opposition became more vocal after the Prime Minister, PAUL KEATING made his statement at Redfern at the launch of the U.N. Year on December 10th. last year.
Part of that statement is as follows and I quote:
"By doing away with the bizarre conceit that this continent had no owners prior to the settlement of Europeans, MABO established a fundamental truth and lays the basis for justice.

It will be much easier to work from that basis than has ever been the case in the past.
For that reason alone we should ignore the isolated outbreaks of hysteria and hostility of the past few months.
MABO is an historic decision, we can make it an historic turning point, the basis of a new relationship between indigenous and non aboriginal australians.
I don't want today to go into the full details of the decision other than to quote a small part. (I Quote.)
"A NATIONAL LEGACY OF UNUTTERABLE SHAME ------THAT IS AUSTRALIA'S LEGACY OF ITS TREATMENT OF ITS INDIGENOUS PEOPLES." (End of quote.)
They are the words used by two judges of the High Court of Australia to describe the aftermath of two centuries of dispossession, degradation and devastation of the Aboriginal Peoples of Australia by the colonial invaders of our country.
I am mindful that today we need to look at the present and the future and not delve too deeply in the past and reopen your physical and emotional scars but looking to the future we should be aware and know about black and mostly hidden history and have it recorded from a koorie as well as a white perspective.
And if I may briefly look at what occurred since the coming of the white man to this continent. A policy of mainly extermination was carried out up till the 2nd. half of the 19th. century. But with abolishment of slavery the churches, humanitarians etc. were now advocating a policy of protection but there was also a strong view that nothing could be done as the koories were dying out.
In 1881 Protector appointed in N.S.W. -Census taken - No of Koories exceeded by far what they thought. Decision taken - Reserves be set up -25 Reserves setup. By 1900 had grown to 133 Reserves and also by 1900 13 separate Koorie schools had been established -staffed by untrained teachers-the last of these separate schools were not to close until the early 1970's - neglected children's act used to take koorie children from their parents.
1909 N.S.W. Parliament passed the draconian ABORIGINES PROTECTION ACT - New Act had two main thrusts - on the one hand it forced koories into a forced segregation on reserves - on other hand it provided for strict control of koorie children - only koories or officers of board allowed on reserves. The act gave the board the right to remove any koorie child from its parents in order to be apprenticed to any master of whom the board approved.(Apprentice age 14 years.)
1915 Labour Act amended so that all children would be affected by the board's control.Aim to end responsibility of Govt. towards koories and also financial aid - reserves to become refuges for old koories - young to be merged into white community - Cootamundra girls home used.

1918 Act amended again and became known to koories as ABORIGINES PERSECUTION BOARD - Kinchella boys home opened and Bomaderry for koorie infants - hundreds of children to homes - the inhuman

treatment of koorie children lasted for 60 yrs. from 1909 to 1969. During these years over 5,300 koorie children were taken away to the homes or to domestic service.
The 1930's saw a fight back by koories and in 1937 the 1st. koorie organization formed, known as ABORIGINES PROGRESSIVE ASSOCIATION.

Troubles at Brewarrina led to select committee into affairs of board. Their recommendation was for assimilation rather than segregation and education should in ordinary state schools.
IN 1938 the 150'th anniversary of european settlement on 26th January koories held meeting in Sydney and issued their koorie manifesto - which called the day a DAY OF MOURNING FOR KOORIES - issued a claim for CITIZENS RIGHTS - their treatment of extermination and protection - want nothing of it - had 150 years of it. Called for Royal Commission into affairs of Protection Board - called on Labour Party and Trade Unions who are indifferent to dangers of cheap sweated labour - the White Australia Policy creates prejudice against us - Koories social outcasts in the land of our ancestors.
Around this time following meeting between states and commonwealth - ASSIMILATION became new policy, eventually Protection Board was changed to Welfare Board - further on provided for 2 koories to sit on Board - later on koories could apply for exemption certificate from provisions of Act - commonly known as DOG LICENCE by koories.
1960's World wide changes - Protests - old establishments neither feared or respected by koories - whole network of board control begun to tumble - section after section of old Act repealed No longer expel koories from reserve to reserve. Won right to drink freely in hotels, but still discrimination in hotels, swimming pools, picture theatres and R.S.L's. 1965 Freedom ride to expose the discrimination then in 1969 on 20th March - ABORIGINES WELFARE BOARD was finally abolished after 86 years of oppression.

Similar things happened in the other states with policies of extermination - protection and assimilation. The reserve situations and the taking of children from their parents.
some of the worst events was the near extermination of the Tasmanian Aboriginals - the crushing of the noonkabah people in trying to protect their sacred site by the Court Govt. in West Aust.. The wages trust Act in Qld. and the disregard for Aboriginal life with the atomic tests at Maralinga in South Aust..

But looking to the future of all the places that the First Commitment to INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS should take place, I can think of no better place than Newcastle. We may not be perfect in our relationships with Koories as individual and institutional racism still exists but not to the same extent as in other places in Australia.

If we look at our record, Newcastle has many credits. The first Trades Hall Council to have an Aboriginal Advancement Committee and an overall strong commitment by Trade Unionists. The first City Council to fly the Aboriginal Flag during National Aboriginal Week and to fly it through out this year. The Churches have also given strong support and the Aboriginal Flag flies on the Cathedral each year during National Aboriginal Week.

The strong relationships and respect that have been developed with the local Koories and other Koorie Communities and organisations throughout N.S.W. in their campaigns over the years - too numerous to relate now.

This also extends to the Northern Territory with the Gurindji People in their struggle with Vestey's and the Federal Govt. for land rights after the visits of Mick Rangiara and Dexter Daniels.

The campaign against the Wages Trust Act in Qld.

The first Aboriginal May Queen, Patricia Russell in 1971 who was crowned by Bob Hawke then President of the A.C.T.U. and later Prime Minister of Australia.

The first University to accept mature age Aboriginal Students.

The first City for the voluntary Aboriginal Resettlement scheme.

The involvement of Newcastle citizens in the establishment of kirrinari and Durangaling Hostels.

The participation and support in the establishment of Newcastle Community Association and its later registration as the AWABAKAL NEWCASTLE ABORIGINAL CO-OPERATIVE and seeing its growth into the areas of pre-school,childcare, medical and dental services, elders and family support, disability services, culture and resource, housing and youth centre and now seeing it being looked upon as a model for other aboriginal organisations by State and Federal Govt's and other statutory bodies.

The growth and acceptance in the community of the NEWCASTLE ABORIGINAL SUPPORT GROUP from its inception in 1980.

The participation and support in the organisation of the MARCH OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE from many areas in the state on National Aboriginal Day in 1974 and the reception at City Hall by the then Lord Mayor Alderman Anderson. Many N.S.W. ELDERS were present and the late Sir Douglas Nicholls and Harold Blair from Victoria. This was followed by a reception at Newcastle Workers Club. The next day Senator Jim Cavenagh then Minister for Aboriginal Affairs came to Newcastle for a meeting and discussion with the Koories.

The support for the Journey for Justice Walkers on their walk Sydney to Brisbane in 1971. The walk begun on National Aborigines Day and they were farewelled by the Lord Mayor of Sydney and received by the then Lord Mayor of Newcastle Ald. Doug McDougall on their way through, the march was to highlight the recognition of the need for Justice for Aboriginal People.
There has been hope and disappointments at the national level.
Failure of McMahon Govt. to commit the Govt. to land rights in 1972. Resulting in tent embassy on lawn of parliament house and its violent removal later in year.
Hope when Whitlam Govt. elected to office. A gain when the amended N.T. Land Rights Act of Whitlam Govt. passed into law in 1977 by the Fraser Govt. after much opposition by the strong mining and pastoral lobby.
The abandonment of national land rights by the Hawke Labour Govt. after a sustained campaign by the mining and pastoral lobby especially in W.A..
The conservative forces have been having a field day playing on the fears and prejudices of people since the MABO High Court Judgement. The High Court itself coming under attack.
If we could get back to the bipartisan approach that happened for the 1967 referendum - the result being that an un precedent 92% of Australians agreed to remove discriminatory provisions against Aborigines from the constitution. They agreed to give the Commonwealth power to make laws for Aborigines and to include Aborigines in the census.
But this coming together to-day is a new start in the healing process and walking and working together to obtain justice for indigenous australians and as I said in my submission to the Constitutional Commission at its public hearing s in Newcastle in 1986.
"I believe the Aboriginal People wish to share this land with White Australians in Peace and Friendship. Their demand to manage their own affairs is not an expression of exclusiveness and isolation but the friendship they seek must be based upon a just settlement and on mutual respect.
As another first for Newcastle the Lord Mayor Ald. John McNaughton and Manager signed a STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT TO INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS on behalf of the City Council and witnessed by KOORIE ELDERS last Tuesday Night. This was endorsed by all council members.
The Trades Hall Council President and Secretary also signed a STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT and witnessed by Koorie Elders last Thursday night and this was endorsed by all delegates.

I now on behalf of all Persons who have signed the COMMITMENT present to the KOORIES "THE HUNTER COMMITMENT TO INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS". It reads as follows:-

I acknowledge that Indigenous Australians are the first people of this land and have survived over two centuries of persecution.

I grieve for the losses of Australian Indigenous people, their land, their children, their health, their lives.

I grieve over the high rate of imprisonment and the many Black deaths in custody.

I acknowledge the right of Indigenous Australians to live according to their own values and customs.

I undertake to make myself better informed of the facts of non-indigenous settlement of Australia.

I promise to listen to what Indigenous Australians are telling me and to think about what it must be like to live with racism every day.

I will interrupt racist remarks and jokes whenever I´am in a position to.

I promise to respect Aboriginal sacred sites and special places in the Hunter Region.

I recognise the vital contribution of Indigenous people to the Hunter Region and I look forward to a future of mutual respect and harmony.

I support Indigenous and non-indigenous people working together for a treaty or other instrument of reconciliation.

End of content.

The Koories can now send a message stick to the other Indigenous Australians that there are people of goodwill and we on our part can work to have a COMING TOGETHER DAY all across Australia.

From here on we can give new meaning to the R´s. Recognition, Respect and Racial Equality.

RECOGNITION of the rights of Indigenous Australians.

RESPECT for Koories as human beings and for each others culture.

RACIAL EQUALITY - Do away with superior and inferior as all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights - and should act towards one another in a spirit of Brotherhood.

In conclusion I will read a poem of the late Kath Walker.

A Song of Hope

Look up, my people,
The dawn is breaking,
The world is waking
To a bright new day,
When none defame us,
No restriction tame us,
Nor colour shame us,
Not sneer dismay.

Now brood no more
On the years behind you,
The hope assigned you
Shall the past replace,
When a juster justice
Grown wise and stronger
Points the bone no longer
At a darker race.

So long we waited
Bound and frustrated,
Till hate be hated
And caste deposed;
Now light shall guide us,
No goal denied us,
And all doors open
That long were closed.

See plain the promise,
Dark freedom lover!
Night's nearly over,
And though long the climb,
New rights will greet us,
New mateship meet us
And joy complete us
In our new Dream Time.

To our fathers' fathers
The pain; the sorrow;
To our children's children
The glad tomorrow.

Speech delivered on 28-11-1993 at Newcastle foreshore.