

Bludgers in Grass Castles

**Native Title & the Unpaid
Debts of the Pastoral
Industry**

Martin Taylor

Contents

Introduction	3
Kings in grass castles — 3 ● The ‘threat’ of native title — 3 ● The powers behind the pastoralists — 5 ● Politicians help themselves — 6 ● Reconciliation: all talk, no action? — 6 ● The aim of this essay — 7	
Pastoralism in Queensland: A (Brief) History	8
Marauding nomads invade — 8 ● Resistance to invasion — 8 ● Aboriginal labour pool — 9 ● The pool dries up — 11 ● Pastoral colonialism around the world — 12 ● The balance sheet — 13	
Crimes Ignored	16
Stolen land — 16 ● Destruction of Aboriginal heritage — 17 ● Genocide and racism — 18 ● Lands laid waste — 19 ● Poison — 20 ● Anti-environmentalism — 21	
Bills Overdue	23
Back pay — 23 ● Aboriginal pastures — 23 ● Direct public subsidies — 24 ● Indirect subsidies: infrastructure and token rents — 25	
The Future of the Pastoral Industry	27
Leaner and meaner — 27 ● Is the pastoral zone relevant? — 28 ● A new pastoral economy? — 29 ● Conclusion — 29	
Notes	31

First printed 1997; reprinted 1998 (twice), 2009, 2017

ISBN 978-0-909196-72-1

Published by Resistance Books, resistancebooks.com

Introduction

‘We are not talking about guilt: we are talking about debt. We must accept the debt.’ — *Camilla Cowley, pastoral leaseholder*¹

Kings in grass castles

Pastoralists in Australia are a group of about 20,000 business people who raise animals, mostly beef cattle and sheep, for profit. In Australia they monopolise the use of about 75% of the land area, primarily publicly owned land that they lease from the government for this purpose.²

Pastoralists enjoy a prestige that is unassailable in Australian culture. They project an image of self-made individualism best expressed by Sidney Kidman, the land speculator whose exploits were celebrated in Ion Idriess’ book *Cattle King*, or the Durack dynasty, described in Mary Durack’s *Kings in Grass Castles*.³ So when their leaders tell the public a bald lie, such as that Aboriginal native title claimants plan to throw them off their pastoral leases, the public tend to believe them.

This image is a fake. Pastoralists have always relied on the indulgence and active participation of governments. The state helped to put down Aboriginal resistance, controlled the cheap pool of Aboriginal labour, leased land to pastoralists, built dams, irrigation schemes, railways, ports and development roads, poured money into research for stock and pasture improvement, lobbied for overseas markets and provided easy credit, protective tariffs, fertiliser subsidies, diesel rebates and tax relief.

Whenever they face threats, from drought to Aboriginal land claims, the first reflex of the pastoralists is to beg the state to fix it. It is ironic that Aborigines have been forced into a dependence on the state that they never asked for, while pastoralists

Martin Taylor trained as an ecologist. He has done research on biological control of pests and the evolution of resistance to pesticides in agricultural and urban pests and is the author of numerous scientific papers.

clamor for more dependence on the state, pretending that they never had it.

The ‘threat’ of native title

Aboriginal leaders are accusing the Australian government of declaring war by abolishing their claims to native lands ...

Aborigines were only counted as Australian citizens and allowed to vote in 1967. Before that, they were governed under flora and fauna laws.

Australia’s 300,000 Aborigines are the most disadvantaged group in Australia’s population of 18 million. They have a life expectancy 17 to 20 years less than white Australians.

Many early settlers in Australia regarded Aborigines as pests and tried to eradicate them from their land by shooting them and poisoning their sources of water.⁴

Racism and injustice are a daily experience for many Aboriginal Australians. It is also the shame of the many white Australians who comfortably ignore the fact that their prosperity was built through the destruction of Aboriginal society and economy.

The most dramatic challenge to Aboriginal rights is unfolding at time of writing in late 1997. In December 1996, the High Court of Australia agreed with the Wik people of Cape York that they *could* make title claims to public land that is leased to pastoralists. Native title claims have become a possibility, if unlikely in most instances, for 42% of Australia’s land that is leased to pastoralists. Pastoral leases as now constituted only permit grazing of livestock.

The British colonial government had balked at complete alienation of pastoral lands in recognition of the existing usage rights of Aboriginal peoples, and with an eye to other future uses of the land.⁵

The “successes” of the federal *Native Title Act 1993* and the *Wik* case were actually unfavourable to Aboriginal interests.

In the *Wik* case, the High Court made it clear that the established rights of pastoral and mining leaseholders actually overrode native title rights wherever there is conflict. Aboriginal claimants and pastoralists both share weak positions relative to mining interests. For example, mining company ERA is opening a new uranium mine at Jabiluka, despite complete opposition from traditional owners. The impunity of the mining interests is legally assured.

Native title rights as defined in the *Native Title Act* are not freehold title rights, but are only rights of access for traditional hunting, fishing and ceremonial purposes, and rights of consultation on future uses of the land. This is a no more significant burden than pastoralists already face, having to consult with appropriate government departments while planning any major development of their leases. Aboriginal owners

cannot negotiate the automatic renewal of leases, and they cannot sell nor change the use of the land involved.

The National Indigenous Working Group on native title has expressed acceptance of the ongoing validity of leases and the superior rights of pastoral leaseholders.⁶ Aboriginal claimants have consistently shown their openness to dialogue and negotiation.

Despite this respectful Aboriginal position, most if not all pastoralists have demanded the government “extinguish” native title on their leases. The justification is given the bland code-word of “certainty”. Aboriginal title claims are defined as “uncertainty”. The falsehood promoted to the Australian public and to their own members by the National Farmers’ Federation (NFF) and the National Party of Australia (NPA) is that Aboriginal claimants plan to throw pastoralists off their leases.

Most Australians have no strong reason to give their unqualified support to pastoralists, whom in fact they subsidise, whose contribution to the economy is declining and some of whom show little concern for other Australians, as evidenced most recently by the jobs being shed from meat processing industries, because more profit can be made from live cattle exports than from sales to domestic meat processors.⁷

The powers behind the pastoralists

It is important, however, to point out that not all pastoralists and not only pastoralists are at the heart of the present efforts to frustrate native title rights of Aboriginal groups.

The interests of the large corporate pastoralists do not necessarily coincide with those of smaller operators. Also, pastoralists are only one component of a large industry of meat and wool production. Many financial speculators, industry managers and politicians have their own interests in extinguishment of native title, regardless of the amount of taxpayers’ money that may have to be spent to that end, or even regardless of the wellbeing of pastoralists themselves.

The “threat” of native title is in large part the invention of the few big operators who control the NFF and NPA. Indeed, Rick Farley, former executive secretary of the NFF, blames the whole phenomenon squarely on the leaders of the Liberal Party-NPA coalition government, who, he suggests, have created the whole issue by deliberately lying to pastoralists and the public so that they can be seen to solve *something* and thus win more approval at the ballot box.⁸

Most small operators have been drawn in by the rhetoric and disinformation of their leaders, with some notable exceptions, such as Pat Hewitt, a goat breeder in Mitchell, and Camilla Cowley, now an active campaigner for native title.⁹ On Cape

York in north Queensland, pastoralists have already negotiated a mutually acceptable agreement with Aboriginal owners and environmentalists.

Politicians help themselves

In Queensland, the NPA government recently tried to pass a bill to accelerate the ongoing conversion of pastoral leases to freehold title, providing for below-market land prices and interest-free loans to “buy out” the leases. Conversion loans under the *Land Act 1994* are already set at 6% interest, already well below commercial property rates of 8–11%.

Four Queensland government ministers including Howard Hobbs, the Minister for Natural Resources, whose department administers land transfers, are pastoral leaseholders with a personal profit to make from extinguishment of native title. Australia-wide, the richest individuals, including the NPA president, stand to gain the most from this plan.¹⁰

Reconciliation: all talk, no action?

“Reconciliation” has changed from a program for white Australians to make amends for the dispossession and genocide of Aborigines, into an empty buzzword in the public culture. The loss of meaning is best illustrated by the cartoonist Tandberg, who draws a man saying: “*I believe in reconciliation. I believe Aborigines should be reconciled to having nothing*”.¹¹

Reconciliation is a program that white Australians are morally bound to follow. Apologies and breast-beating may be emotionally satisfying, but leave nothing materially redressed. Concrete amends must be made.

The most urgent task of reconciliation is to put a stop to present attempts by the leaders of the pastoralists to complete the dispossession that began in 1788. By extinguishing native title, they pave the way for acquiring freehold title themselves, a long-sought goal.

After months of condemning the “10-point plan” of Liberal Party Prime Minister John Howard, the NFF and their allies in the NPA warmed to it, while pretending dissatisfaction.¹² This is no surprise. Howard’s plan is one of stealth for extinguishment of native title, hidden within the text of the ten points, none of which the average citizen could recite, if asked. The Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) has soundly condemned the plan as a legal minefield that violates the *Racial Discrimination Act* and would entail massive compensation, at taxpayers’ expense, to “buy out” the native title rights of Aboriginal groups; another of many public subsidies to pastoralists.¹³

A possibility rarely found in public debate is the blanket extinguishment of *pastoral*

leases, a policy with some merit considering that the land was originally taken by force from Aboriginal owners, and then quite generally degraded through overstocking in open violation of lease requirements.

The aim of this essay

The purposes of this essay are twofold. Firstly, I wish to challenge the myth that pastoralists are self-made individualists whose successes owe nothing to governments and even less to Aborigines. Secondly, I wish to convince the reader that recognition of native title rights on pastoral leases is the moral responsibility of all Australians, pastoralists or otherwise.

It is not the intent of this essay to imply that pastoralists are not hard workers, nor that they produce nothing useful, but to show that the success of pastoralists is due to unpaid human and ecological costs and continual state subsidies.

Some of these debts and subsidies may well be justified through the wider public good which may have come of it, but many, such as the dispossession of Aborigines and the extinction of native wildlife, cannot be justified. In a fair system the pastoralists and the state agencies that have supported them would be required to make amends for past injustices, for damage caused and public money wasted.

This book is written primarily for my non-Aboriginal compatriots, not for my Aboriginal fellow citizens who need little education on these matters. As rights of Aboriginal access are already assured in other states, native title is an issue only in Queensland and New South Wales. Because Queensland has one of the worst records of injustice to Aborigines, and also one of the loudest pastoral lobbies, this book focuses on pastoralists in Queensland.

The pastoralists are set to frustrate native title claims and at the same time complete the dispossession of last century by acquiring freehold title to 42% of Australia. All Australians must do what they can to put a stop to this monumental injustice. The first step is to realize that the “kings in grass castles”, like the emperor of the fable, have no clothes.

Martin Taylor

1997

Pastoralism in Queensland: A (Brief) History

Marauding nomads invade¹⁴

In the 1840s, a swarm of “squatters” with guns blazing and cattle before them, advanced over an inland route from the north-central highlands of NSW. Heartened by earlier conquests further south, they claimed large territories for themselves in the Darling Downs of Queensland. By 1860 they had pushed as far north as Rockhampton and west to Roma, and by 1864 had occupied nearly all of Queensland. The *Pastoral Leases Act 1869* legitimized occupation and extended pastoral leases to the present borders of Queensland.¹⁵

Many of the invaders were frankly opportunistic. They saw it as a way to make quick money before going “home”. George Leslie, one of the revered “pioneers” of Queensland in white histories, wrote:

Australia is a very nice, agreeable country for a person to stay a few years in, but to settle in ultimately it would never enter my head.¹⁶

Even so, most of the invaders did settle, to the extent permitted by an economy within which land is a tradeable commodity.

The colony of Queensland was initially dependent on pastoralists, who accounted for 90% of production at that time. The government legitimised the invasion by claiming crown ownership and “leasing” the land. This expropriation was only possible under the presumption that the land belonged to the the British crown, a presumption that was recently established to have been technically illegal.

Resistance to invasion

Aboriginal groups that had given a friendly welcome and generous assistance to the nomadic European “explorers”, like Ludwig Leichhardt, Robert Burke, William Wills and Thomas Mitchell, soon found that the “settlers” who followed close behind wanted

to take, not to share the land.¹⁷ The pastoralists who invaded Queensland were already hardened by conquests in NSW and Victoria. They came heavily armed and prepared for merciless war against the Aboriginal owners. Aboriginal nations that were used only to minor feuding were exposed to the total warfare of civilised Europe — mass slaughter, rape and devastation with poison, bullets, disease, whips, iron chains, concentration camps and the useful doctrines of racial superiority.

One example (among many) was the poisoning with strychnine-laced flour of an entire group on Evan MacKenzie's pastoral property at Kilcoy, north of Brisbane, in 1842.¹⁸

Resistance to the British invasion was immediate and widespread. Aboriginal resisters faced a rate of retaliation of as many as 50 black deaths for every white death. As in most wars, direct killing was not as devastating to Aboriginal populations as disease, famine and low birth rates.¹⁹

Pastoralists and farmers stole not only land but the people and their labour. Young men from southern tribes, after suitable brutalisation, formed the rank and file of the Queensland Native Police. Originally intended as an impartial force to subdue black-white conflict, they soon became a sort of death squad against Aborigines. The role of the native police became open genocide disguised by code-words like “dispersal” or “making the area safe”. Such divisive tactics have a long history. Squads of poor Indian boys are still being sent to kill poor Indian peasants in Mexico and Central America.²⁰

Guerrilla resistance continued into the 1890s, most notably by the Kalkadoon warriors of north-central Queensland and Jandamarra's warriors in north-west Australia.²¹

With many warriors killed or captured and much of their country usurped, armed resistance ended and many people were pushed into fringe camps to be drafted as stockmen or menial workers. Women and young girls became domestic servants, often entailing rape and sexual abuse by white masters.

Although the Aboriginal side of the war ended, the white side continued. There was a large massacre at Forrest River, in the far north-west of Australia, as recently as 1926.

Today, violence against Aborigines by police continues, while pastoralists are poised to complete the usurpation that began last century.

Aboriginal labour pool

Last century, most central and western Aborigines remained on their own country, but subjugated to the pastoralists in a feudal arrangement similar to the *hacienda*

system that developed throughout post-conquest Latin America.

Despite Aboriginal disdain for regimented labour, which “required” constant bullying, Aboriginal pasture and animal management skills were highly valuable to white pastoralists, who were thus able to avoid expensive capital improvements like fencing.

Half of all labour was supplied by Aboriginal stockmen, but was repaid only in blankets, food and tobacco. Subordinated to white bosses, many stockmen and their families in pastoral districts were nevertheless able to remain on and thus maintain links with their homelands.²²

Throughout this period, however, white resentment grew against the cheap labour force of the pastoralists. Depressed beef prices, drought, labour unrest and better capital availability made Aboriginal labour less attractive to pastoralists.

With nationhood in 1901, Aborigines ceased to be British subjects with rights theoretically equal to those of whites and instead became wards of the Australian states. Their legal status was downgraded to that of children. An atmosphere of intense white supremacy developed given legal expression in the White Australia policy, which lasted from 1905 until the 1960s, and which persists today in the platforms of political parties like Australia First and One Nation.

State control of Aboriginal labour intensified in the early years of this century. Work “contracts” at low wages were enforced, supposedly to protect Aboriginal workers from abuse by pastoralists. But now, their home on the range was increasingly denied to them when contracts ended. Because they were less able to remain, their hold on their country became more tenuous. In addition, the state was keen on increasing “closer” or denser white settlement of the western parts of Queensland, as a means of dealing with the large numbers of returned soldiers from World War I. Many returned soldiers were given settlement blocks, but most ended in failure.

Under new policies of “assimilation” starting in 1910 and lasting until the late 1960s, more than 100,000 Aboriginal children, mostly of mixed parentage, were kidnapped from their parents by church and state agencies.²³ Aboriginal “protectors” had power to relocate Aborigines to reserves and missions, which were in effect concentration camps. The state managed the Aboriginal population as a labour pool to serve white business demands.

Totalitarian surveillance and control of individual Aboriginal lives, even down to their savings accounts, were established. Aborigines had to carry identity papers and were subject to curfews and restrictions on movements in the style of apartheid in South Africa or segregation in southern USA. Wages for Aborigines were fixed by the “protector” at about one third of that of whites, although it was widely acknowledged

by pastoralists that Aboriginal stockmen who grew up in “the bush” were superior workers.

As Dawn May noted, “capitalism had taken root”.²⁴ Displaced Aborigines could have found some economic, if not cultural, relief by entering the working class. During World War II this “proletarian” route seemed possible: Aborigines had served as troops and industrial workers with a new level of acceptance by whites.

White racism and a dependent legal status were to frustrate even this outlet in the post-World War II years. At the same time that whites denied Aborigines access to white society and economy, they hypocritically accused them of failure to “assimilate”. The possibility of whites assimilating to Aboriginal society has never been raised, to my knowledge, although a small number of convict or shipwrecked whites were readily accepted into Aboriginal societies.

The pool dries up

After World War II, capitalisation of beef production intensified, in an economy of declining prices and intensified global competition. This trend has continued. Export markets are highly risky, and wild cycles in prices and demand ensure failures of smaller operators well into the future.²⁵

Aboriginal employment fell in the post-war cattle industry and in industry generally, as Australian apartheid grew. The 1967 federal referendum which admitted Aborigines as citizens was, ironically, the last straw for Aboriginal labour in the cattle industry. Equal pay was now enforced and most pastoralists simply sacked Aboriginal workers. With nowhere else to go, Aboriginal people found themselves increasingly confined to reserves and missions or at the “bottom of the heap” in cities, suffering social dislocation, alcoholism and mental illness.

To borrow US military jargon from the Vietnam War, Aborigines were confined to “strategic hamlets” surrounded by “free-fire zones”. Police violence against Aborigines in the “wrong place” became a fact of life that continues into the 1990s with Aborigines suffering incarceration rates fourteen times that of the non-Aboriginal population.²⁶

In March 1997, Queensland police were recorded on video as they beat up Aboriginal youths in Ipswich with the assistance of US marines, making the double layer of present-day colonialism quite clear. Also in 1997 and also in Ipswich, the openly racist and Anglocentric One Nation party was established, similar to the Nazi party of 1930s Germany, but with an ironic twist — Anglo-Saxons are native to Germany, but not to Australia.

Despite these adverse circumstances, Aboriginal activists and many non-Aboriginal

sympathisers have advanced the land rights cause. Land rights, given new life by the Whitlam Labor administration of 1972–75, gathered steam, leading to the *Mabo* case in 1992 which overturned the empty land doctrine, the *Native Title Act 1993* and the *Wik/Thayorre* case in 1996, which determined that pastoral leases do not give exclusive possession to leaseholders.

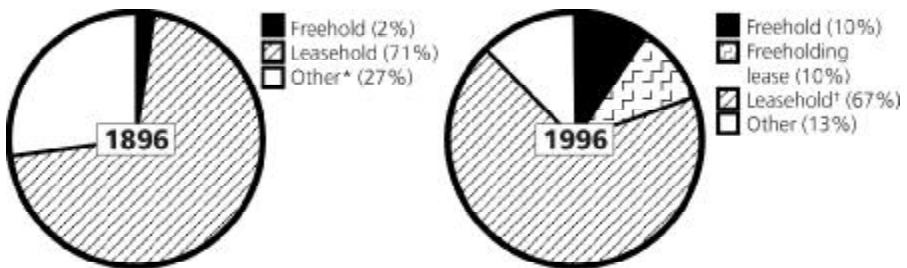
Pastoral colonialism around the world

Having reviewed the Australian dispossession, it is worth asking whether this history is in any way unique. A quick review reveals that beef and sheep pastoralists have been in the vanguard of wars against indigenous peoples elsewhere, especially in the Americas.

In North America, European cattle ranchers were always the first to clash with Native American owners, particularly in the western prairie states. The indigenous economy of hunting large herds of deer, elk, caribou and bison was highly developed in all of North America but most highly specialised among the Plains Indians, who lived almost entirely from bison that they hunted from horseback.

European hunters decimated bison herds during the mid 1800s with the explicit purpose of depriving Indians of their food supply. By the 1880s, cattle and sheep pastoralists had taken and fenced off most of the grasslands and began overgrazing the land in pursuit of profit, soon coming into conflict even among themselves in “range wars”. The cattlemen were the most ruthless. They came to dominate western grazing lands, which are primarily *public* lands leased to them at below-market rentals.

Figure 1. Land tenure in Queensland 1896 & 1996



Area of Australia claimed under the *Aboriginal Land Act 1991*: **1.51%**

* Includes vacant crown land, national parks, state, Aboriginal and other reserves.

† Includes Aboriginal leases on Cape York.³¹

They killed Indians and even other white settlers in their way, exterminated wildlife, devastated once lush grasslands and forests, polluted rivers with erosion and manure, and lowered water tables both from pumping of aquifers and reduced percolation of rainfall through the hard packed soils.²⁷

In Mexico, Central and South America a similar history is still unfolding. An indigenous Mayan army rose up in rebellion in 1994 in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas. They destroyed property records and expelled big ranchers from their lands. Ranchers had had a long history of using private vigilante squads with names like “The White Guardians” or “The Throat-slashers” to take over Indian lands.²⁸

In Brazil, the deforestation of the Amazon jungles that came to world attention in the late 1980s was traced to ranchers who employed forest clearing and vigilante squads to take land from the Indians and other forest dwellers. Chico Mendes, leader of the Rubber Tappers’ Union, was killed by ranchers in 1988. Many of the ranchers in Brazil were actually large foreign corporations like Volkswagen. Paradoxically, land clearing for cattle was in all cases much less productive economically than sustainable harvesting by indigenous peoples of forest products like rubber, brazil nuts and myriad fruits, gums and spices. However, productivity was not the central issue. Under European-derived legal systems, land-clearing and cattle grazing provide evidence of a firm land claim. Ranchers were speculating in land values first, cattle production being only a secondary concern.²⁹

All of these examples have a common thread, namely they were actively supported by government authorities. The land rights of indigenous people were ignored or denied, primarily because they lack any political influence in the government. Ranchers are almost always powerful individuals or corporations that have political influence over or are actually part of the state.

The balance sheet

The first “protector” of Aborigines in Queensland, Archibald Meston, wrote in 1896 this indictment of the invasion, in the form of a statement of balance:

It seems well to consider our debtors account with the Aborigines. Queensland has so far alienated about 10 million acres [4.05 million hectares] of freehold land, and leasehold about 300 million acres [121.41 million hectares] for pastoral occupation. For this we have received about six and a quarter millions in cash, and for the leasehold land we receive £332,800 annual rent. Since the year of separation [creation of the colony of Queensland], 1859 or even since 1842, we have not expended £50,000 for the benefit of the Aborigines, and have never since then or before paid them a single shilling in cash, clothes or food, or even an acre of land.³⁰

The shocking fact is that a century later the balance sheet made without consent of the creditors and written in their blood is even more in the red. To compound the outrage, white Australians now seem to be even less inclined to redress this injustice than was Meston, writing a century ago. Other debts unmentioned by him remain unpaid or irredeemable, while terrible crimes remain unprosecuted, uncompensated and forgotten.

Increased alienation of public land to private ownership under freehold title since Meston's calculations reflects a century of non-Aboriginal population and economic growth, but more importantly, the material result of policies of successive state governments that have sought to transfer pastoral leases to freehold title (see Figure 1). The bulk of leasehold tenure is for pastoral purposes. After 1945, "alienation" of

Figure 2. *Farming zones of Australia*³³



pastoral leases accelerated.

Successive Queensland governments, especially those of the NPA, offered loans at no or low interest rates and 30–50 year terms to allow pastoralists to purchase freehold title to their leases. Government policies, often in spite of expressed concern for family operators, have also shown a consistent bias toward large corporate operations, at the expense of smaller operators, who are rapidly diminishing in number. Pastoral lands have consequently come to be dominated by large corporate interests. The largest leaseholder in Australia at the beginning of 1997 was the firm established by the “Cattle King” Sidney Kidman, with 11,700 km². By September it was the Stanbroke Pastoral Co., a subsidiary of the insurance company AMP, with 13,000 km² of pastoral holdings.

Seventy-one thousand and seven hundred square kilometres, nearly 1% of all Australian land (an area larger than Ireland), is leased to just six foreign-owned companies, the largest being the US-owned Qld and NT Pastoral Co.³² More dramatic change will come in the next few years, if extinguishment of native title on pastoral leases succeeds.

Crimes Ignored

Stolen land

It is important to remember that a minority of the British invaders of last century dealt fairly with Aboriginal people, developing relations of mutual respect and cooperation despite the cultural gulf and the general climate of warfare.³⁴ These historical facts refute the familiar apology of “*values were different back then*” and establish that British immigration to Australia could have proceeded more peaceably and equitably than it did.

Many non-Aboriginal pastoralists enjoy cooperative relations with their Aboriginal neighbours, providing an important model for a society based on reconciliation rather than domination and denial.³⁵

The High Court case of 1996 determined that native title rights of the Wik and Thayorre peoples were “not necessarily extinguished” by pastoral leases. “Extinguishment” would be considered ridiculous if considered in commercial dealings among non-Aboriginal claimants. Legislated extinguishment threatens to create an unnecessary legacy of Aboriginal compensation claims, as Aboriginal lawyer Noel Pearson and the ALRC have stressed.³⁶

Tenancy, regardless of duration, has never “extinguished” ownership rights of landlords in common law, unless the landlord has not shown up for many years, in which case squatting may permit a lawful claim to possession. However, it must be stressed that native title rights are not the same as freehold rights of a landlord. Also, the historical persons we erroneously refer to as “squatters” are more correctly referred to as thieves or pirates, since they took land by force; a fact copiously recorded in written accounts of the invasion.

Their theft was, in any case, blessed by the state, which led to the very system of pastoral leases that we have now.

Under the *Native Title Act 1993* claimants must present proof of cultural connection to the ancestral lands they claim. Howard’s 10-point plan requires strictly a *physical*

connection. Over a century of forced displacement makes this a formidable task for Aboriginal claimants.

The present federal government, by proposing to legislate “extinguishment”, can only be doing so out of racism and greed. It sets back the legal rights of Aborigines to pre-1850 standards. The paradoxical effect of the impending legislation has been a pre-emptive surge in native title claims.³⁷

The overturning of the empty land (*terra nullius*) doctrine, by the High Court decision in favour of Murray Islander Eddie Mabo in 1992, amounts to an admission that the land was already owned when it was claimed by the British colonial government as crown land. Compensation was never paid for land seized, nor was Aboriginal consent sought.

Hence all Australia may properly be considered the stolen property of Aboriginal peoples whose descendants retain some legal entitlements under common law. Any attempt to further alienate lands while claims are pending amounts to dealing in stolen property.

Destruction of Aboriginal heritage

Thoughtless or deliberate destruction of Aboriginal sites and objects has continued with little notice since 1788. A recent example in Brisbane, not on pastoral leases, is the ongoing struggle to stop a housing developer from bulldozing a bora-ring, an Aboriginal sacred ceremonial site, in the Brisbane suburb of Kippa-ring, which is actually named after the site.³⁸ Only recently has a national register of indigenous sites been compiled, growing to 85,000 records as of 1994, the vast majority of which are, for practical purposes, unprotected.³⁹

In violation of such laws as now cover Aboriginal heritage, some pastoralists have attempted to frustrate Aboriginal land claims by destruction of evidence of Aboriginal occupation on pastoral leases.

A pastoralist in the central Queensland town of Augathella recently boasted to reporter Tony Koch of the Brisbane *Courier Mail*, that he had driven a bulldozer “through the bora rings and they finished up in the creek — never to be found again”.⁴⁰

A Queensland state employee anonymously testified in April 1997 that outside the protection of Carnarvon Gorge National Park, ancient Aboriginal cave paintings had been destroyed with explosives by pastoralists, and that this was “common knowledge” in the area. Park staff member Pam Walsh told me she had not heard this story when I asked her about it in September 1997. However, she did offer her opinion that certain pastoralists around the park “would not hesitate” to destroy any evidence of Aboriginal presence on their leases if they thought it would stop native title claims.

Despite this “common knowledge”, only one prosecution for vandalism of Aboriginal cultural property has ever been prosecuted, in NSW. In Queensland, existing heritage legislation provides for no involvement of Aboriginal interests in protecting their own heritage.⁴¹

The major objective of many native title claimants is simply to regain access to sacred sites and other areas of traditional significance. Until they are permitted the full extent of vandalism will never be known.

Genocide & racism

No dollar amount can be placed on the destruction of life, economy and culture of Aboriginal people, but the scale of this “holocaust” can be outlined.

At least 10,000 people were killed out of a pre-invasion Queensland population of over 120,000. This, combined with the other ravages of war, led to a dramatic collapse of the Aboriginal population to as few as 20,000 in 1920.⁴² Existing population estimates have been criticised as biased due to the ignorance of and desire to downplay numbers by early white chroniclers:

- Sixty-four per cent of the more than 250 languages spoken in Australia in 1788 are extinct; only 8% remain safe from loss today, mostly in north-west Australia and Cape York.⁴³
- One hundred thousand children, many of them children of Aboriginal women who had been raped by white men, were taken without consent from their parents and reared in state or church care.⁴⁴
- Racism, unemployment, confinement on reserves, state “paternalism” and abuse by police have left a legacy of mental and physical illness, alcoholism and suicide rates many times that of the white population.
- Between 1990 and 1995 there were 96 recorded deaths in custody of indigenous people, who were 17 times more likely than non-indigenous people to die in custody, were 17 times more likely to be arrested and 15 times more likely to be

The similarity of the Australian ‘holocaust’ to the Nazi genocide of Jews, Gypsies and Slavs has not been lost on white racists, who can, for example, write graffiti like:

For sale: Gas ovens (German made) will accommodate at least 30 coons

as recently as 1978 in the Northern Territory.⁴⁶

imprisoned. From 1988 to 1995, the incarceration rate increased by 61%. Most deaths were from suicide or untreated illness. Four Aborigines were shot by police. Of these, three were mentally ill and the fourth was a highly intoxicated 16 year old. None had firearms.

- The human rights situation for Aboriginal people *has actually deteriorated* since the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Deaths in Custody of 1987.⁴⁵

Lands laid waste

There has been some tension in the past between non-Aboriginal environmental organisations and Aboriginal groups, due to European views of “wilderness” and “nature” as somehow “human-free”.⁴⁷ Even the High Court has belatedly admitted that Australia before the British arrived was not an “empty land” but the comfortable and well-managed home of millions of Aboriginal people. “Home” was the entire landscape. “Managed” is also a European word which probably does not adequately describe the traditional Aboriginal conception of belonging to the land, inseparable from the landscape, fauna and flora.

Any comparison with Aboriginal management must conclude that the effect of European invasion on the Australian landscape, fauna and flora has been catastrophic. Because the pastoral industry uses so much land in the ecologically sensitive arid and semi-arid zones, the damage has been extreme relative to the product obtained.

Australia-wide, at least 19 terrestrial mammal species, mostly marsupials, 20 bird species, three amphibians and 76 plant species have been driven to extinction since 1788. Ten per cent of native mammals and 1.5% of the native plants are endangered. Seventy per cent of Australia’s eucalypt forests, 88% of woodland, 90% of rainforests have been lost since 1788. Outrageous as it may seem, the tiny patches of remaining rainforests are still being logged or cleared.

In Australia’s pastoral zone (see Figure 2) about 33% of mammal species are locally extinct, and in heavily cleared agricultural areas over 25% of marsupial species are locally extinct. Twenty-three species are endangered, which means that extinction is highly likely unless effective action is taken. The most urgent case is the northern hairy-nosed wombat, with only 15 breeding females left in the pastoral zones of central Queensland. Another 29 species are vulnerable.

Australia holds the world’s worst record for mammalian extinctions. Fifty per cent of all extinctions in the last 200 years were in Australia. Almost all were marsupials, unique to Australia.⁴⁸

Australia-wide, 40% of plant species extinctions are directly attributable to the pastoral industry.⁴⁹ Two-thirds of arable land and one half of all grazing land has been significantly degraded. Introduced animals (especially rabbits, foxes, cats and pigs), prickly pear and exotic grasses have further harmed native species.

The worst single episode of environmental destruction in Queensland was the clearance of the brigalow forests for conversion to pastures in the years since 1945. This low forest, dominated by the wattle tree *Acacia harpophylla*, covered about 93,000 km² of the moderate rainfall belt of central NSW and Queensland, providing a rich habitat for wildlife. About one-third had been cleared by 1953.

Vigorous regrowth posed a problem for developers. Bulldozers, herbicides and state loans of \$22 million managed to increase the total destruction to about 65% by the early 1980s. Only after the worst damage had been done was any concern shown over the loss of soil, wildlife and plants. Considering just mammals alone, eight species have become extinct within the brigalow belt. Mature brigalow supports 45 species of mammals; the grassland that replaces it, just seven.⁵⁰

In the south-western “mulga” country of Queensland in 1989, state researchers reported that 38% of the land was “extensively eroded”, placing the blame on the pastoralists of that area, who intensified rather than reducing grazing pressure during droughts. Other factors were absence of a regular fire cycle, unregulated native mammal outbreaks and unviable sizes of properties.⁵¹

Poison

Starting in the 1980s, the animal poison 1080 (sodium monofluoroacetate), now banned in the USA for use in baits, has been used on a large scale to destroy dingoes and exotic feral predators or pests like foxes and pigs. Because native wildlife has a higher tolerance for fluoroacetates than do exotic mammals, it has been widely promoted as a means of controlling introduced pests, surely a worthy goal. However, hawks, eagles and other predatory birds are also killed. In addition, most poisoning and hunting campaigns primarily target dingoes, which are native animals that may be important not only in regulating kangaroo populations but also the feral animal populations of foxes and cats, which pose the greatest threat to the smaller native species like bandicoots and echidna. It must be remembered that the principal function of 1080 poisoning is protection of cattle and sheep, not native wildlife.⁵²

Tagging of beef containing growth hormones began only in 1996, and beef was still being rejected for sale due to unacceptable levels of the pesticide chlorfluorazon.⁵³ The legacy of widespread use of persistent pesticides throughout the 1960s and '70s like DDT, dieldrin and heptachlor, still plagues the meat industries. In 1987, violations

of maximum residue levels for these chemicals in meat created a slump in prices and increased public expense in monitoring for violations. Contamination derives as much from non-pastoral uses, such as sugar production and termite treatments, as from pastoral uses, such as cattle and sheep dips.⁵⁴

The routine use of antibiotics, whether injected or in animal feed, has had two side-effects on human health. The first is that many *human* diseases are now resistant to antibiotics, cutting down the available arsenal for attacking disease organisms like tuberculosis that are transmitted by livestock. The second is that consumers themselves are exposed to continual low doses of antibiotics (as well as hormones) with increased risks of developing allergies to the drugs as well as other, less well-known risks such as cancer.

Improved pastures require herbicides and fertilizers. In 1990 herbicide purchases in Australia amounted to \$400 million. Widespread application of phosphate fertilizers has been linked to the toxic blooms of blue-green algae in the inland river systems.⁵⁵

Anti-environmentalism

Compounding abuse of the land, some farmers and pastoralists are defiant of attempts to correct, let alone prosecute, their environmental crimes.

In 1994, Queensland had the lowest percentage (after the Northern Territory) of

Figure 3. *Erosion in grasslands cleared of brigalow forest near Tambo, Central Queensland. (Intact forest appears in the background.)*



farmers planting trees under the National Landcare Program, and the lowest percentage (after Tasmania) of farmers joining Landcare.

Twenty-six per cent of Queensland farmers who had not planted trees in the three years to 1994 gave “not interested” as their reason. There is no program of penalties, nor has there ever been a prosecution to punish environmental damage caused by pastoralists. Instead governments have sunk more and more public money into campaigns to persuade farmers to stop their bad habits.

Twenty-three per cent of Queensland farmers, primarily pastoralists, stated their intention to clear more trees, compared with only 14% Australia-wide.⁵⁶ Just 0.3% of the state’s area, all on leased or state land, was permitted to be cleared in 1996.⁵⁷

Bills Overdue

Back pay

For early 200 years, unpaid or underpaid Aboriginal labour has built the pastoral industry or was engaged in domestic service. It was set on average at one-third of white wages by Aboriginal “protectors” in Queensland, until equal wages were enforced in 1967. No honest effort has ever been made to calculate or recompense this injustice.

Aboriginal pastures

The British invaders marched their cattle and sheep into a world of rich pastures. Early descriptions marvel at the large pastures thick with grass and waterholes teeming with wildlife. There is virtually nowhere in Australia now that we can go to see the richness that clothed this country before cows and sheep arrived. To the tourist, only the countless mangled carcasses that dot the edge of the main highways in western Queensland testify to the still remarkable abundance of native wildlife in the pastoral zone.

Alan Cunningham wrote in 1827 of the Darling Downs in southern Queensland that “they furnish an abundance of grass and...they constitute a sound and valuable sheep pasture”.⁵⁸ John Gilbert wrote of the “clear undulatory grass hills” of nearby Taroom in 1844.⁵⁹ But this was no “wilderness” nor the benign gift of providence. The pastures that the invaders usurped were created by the Aboriginal owners, using “fire-stick” management for good game-hunting and ease of travel.⁶⁰

The debt of improved pastures, the foundation of the pastoral industry, has never been acknowledged by the usurpers. Instead, the original pasture condition has been severely degraded by over a century of abuse, even to the point of pastures being taken over by woody thickets. A squatter writing in 1869 in central NSW observed:

Before the passing of the Land Act...Matong Creek...was a succession of deep waterholes...grass grew to the water's edge...Hundreds of wild ducks could be seen...after the passing of the Act the whole length...became a bed of sand, owing to soil erosion

caused by sheep.⁶¹

Environmental change following arrival of the new cattle/sheep economy was alarmingly rapid. Writing of central Queensland, Gordon ⁶² notes that only 30 years after the white invasion, brigalow shrubland had expanded into formerly grassy plains, wattle had invaded formerly open eucalypt woodlands, most native grasses had disappeared as foreign weeds invaded, soils were compacted and eroded, streams silted and once permanent waterholes had dried out.

Direct public subsidies

State subsidy⁶³ and protection have been the driving force behind development of all industrialised nations. “Free enterprise” alone has never led to industrial development, which would have been impossible without the support of the state for entrepreneurs and capitalists. Despite this historical reality, myths of “free enterprise” are still pushed by industry and business propaganda, and are widely believed.

The premier service of the state to pastoralists was to bless the violent dispossession of the Aboriginal population; a massive expropriation of resources by violence rather than by genuinely “free-market” processes such as negotiation for sale or use of land.

The essential question that must be asked of state subsidy in any democratic society is whether the result is for the broader public good, or whether it enriches only an already wealthy class while perpetuating historical injustices, such as that done to Aboriginal people.

The current push by all major political parties for “economic rationalism” and “free trade” in reality is a preferential system of government favours, like export promotions and tax incentives, for large corporations oriented to huge export markets. This has been disaster for small producers and for Australian workers generally, as some dissident farmers like Rowell Walton have come to recognise.⁶⁴

Ross Fitzgerald, in his history of Queensland, identified a “pro-development” imperative that, regardless of party in office, has guided all state policy since colonial days. Nevertheless, there has always been conflict among factions of pastoralists and the government over the levels and types of subsidy. For example, in 1920 the Labor government of “Red Ted” Theodore in Queensland raised rents on pastoral leases. Rich pastoralists, led by the British Vestey family, retaliated by pressuring London banks to deny loans to the state government.

In 1995, Australians paid an equivalent of \$1.556 billion in government subsidies to the agricultural sector (\$6000 each year for every farmer), \$367 million of which went to pastoral industries (exclusive of dairy production).⁶⁵

The five major components of subsidies, in order of diminishing significance,

were:

- Funds for farm “restructuring”, which explicitly favour land concentration into larger holdings;
- Industry research and development, such as by the Department of Primary Industries and the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation;
- Tax concessions;
- Interest rate drought relief (\$128 million in 1995–96); and
- Diesel fuel rebates (\$0.32 per litre in 1996).

However, it must be stressed that such levels of subsidy are not unusual and in fact are in the lower ranks among the developed nations. In addition, all the states are committed to full cost recovery on subsidies by 2001. It remains to be seen whether this will ever happen.

The federal government’s recent \$517 million rural aid package came with the contorted justification that this massive subsidy will somehow “wean farmers off their ‘welfare mentality’”.⁶⁶ However, the package quite explicitly aims at eliminating smaller “unprofitable” producers from the rural sector, encouraging the ongoing trends of land concentration, job cutting and rural depopulation in favour of large corporate operators. “Unprofitable” enterprises are encouraged to leave the industry with \$45,000 grants.

Indirect subsidies: infrastructure & token rents

The foregoing Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development calculations do not include other subsidies in the form of infrastructure creation and token rents.

In 1997 alone, \$1.612 billion was budgeted by Queensland for road and rail infrastructure, about half for rural areas, \$74 million for water resource development, and \$4.5 million to pest management. The Queensland Farmers’ Federation director observed: “There are some big spending programmes in rural areas.”⁶⁷

In Queensland rents on pastoral leases are well below market rents. Unfortunately, very little comparable rented land is available to estimate the gap. That below-market rents are a deliberate subsidy to encourage “development” cannot be disputed, however, as such subsidies were recommended in a recent report which formed the basis for the “reforms” of the *Land Act 1994*.⁶⁸ In 1996, 10% of lessees were in arrears of even these low rents.⁶⁹ Historically, the situation was even worse. Before the *Land Act 1994*, rent used to be calculated per head of stock. This system was notorious for fraudulent under-reporting of stock numbers and a drastically widening gap between actual and market rents.⁷⁰

The gap between market and state rents has, of course, been incorporated into the

market price of the lease, a hidden subsidy to pastoralists. In contrast to Queensland, the United States Federal Bureau of Land Management has recently started to raise the rents for grazing cattle on public lands in western USA.

In Queensland there are several categories of pastoral lease. On all leases the primary economic activity is restricted to raising of livestock. The state owns only the land, timber and mineral resources. Any capital improvements, like dams and fences, belong to the lessee and form part of the market price of the lease.

Conversion to freehold title will allow pastoralists to stop being pastoralists, to develop or subdivide and resell land and thus reap windfall profits. With the present crisis in the rural sector from drought, global competition, government policies and fluctuating prices that favour larger operators, freehold title would bring substantial commercial benefits that pastoral leasehold alone cannot.

Beginning in 1957, most leases could readily be converted into freeholding leases, by signing a mortgage agreement for eventual freehold rights. Interest on the 30–50 year government loans is well below market rates. Many pre-1994 freeholding leases were interest-free and *continue to be so*. Payments do not even cover the costs of collection.⁷¹

Legally, leases may be revoked and fines levied if the land is abused or degraded. In reality, the Queensland government has no program of monitoring for violations nor for controls over stocking rates.

Aboriginal rights of access were guaranteed in Queensland during the nineteenth century, but not in the twentieth. These rights still exist in Western Australia and the Northern Territory.⁷² Queensland has the largest proportion of pastoral lands under leasehold titles. Hence Queensland is the state where pastoralists are the loudest opponents of native title. A long period of exclusive occupancy in combination with token rents has cemented in the minds of many pastoralists a perception of “ownership” that is not legally justified.

The Future of the Pastoral Industry

Leaner & meaner

Despite the generous support of governments, the Australian beef industry has been in decline since World War II and the sheep industry static. This has nothing to do with the imagined “threat” of native title. Indeed, the pastoralists’ attacks on native title are a response to the troubles that afflict the pastoral economy in Australia.

Agriculture in 1996 accounted for only 2.4% of Australian gross domestic product. Livestock production therefore accounts for less than 1% of GDP. In Queensland, only 8% of GDP is from agriculture. Roughly half of the annual national beef production is exported, and 61% of all exports went to Asia in 1996. Meat production has been in slow decline for at least 50 years, due to reduced consumption for health reasons and global overproduction relative to demand.⁷³ Recent reports from US health researchers have recommended halving red-meat consumption in wealthy countries like Australia.⁷⁴

Other major dampeners on livestock production are the instability of financial markets in Asia and the present era of persistent droughts, which some experts attribute to global warming and in turn, to massive use of fossil fuels by the industrial nations.

Australia-wide, pastoralists have consistently overstocked to compensate for price drops and drought. Thus there has been a long, slow trend to concentration of land into larger properties, driven as much by inflating pastoralist incomes as from reducing unit costs. As noted earlier, government aid also favours larger operations.⁷⁵

The current attempt by pastoralists to stop native title and acquire freehold title may well be driven by the depression in the livestock sector. Freehold title would provide an escape from specialist livestock production and permit diversification of business interests or outright subdivision and sale to collect windfall profits on increased land values. In other words, pastoralists could stop being pastoralists.

Is the pastoral zone relevant?

The pastoral zone was *20 times less productive* in livestock income per hectare in 1993–94 than was the broad-acre zone. Rents were also very much lower. Of course, lower rents should be paid on less productive land. However, rents as a percentage of income from livestock were about one-third lower in the pastoral zone than in the rest of Australia (see Figure 4).

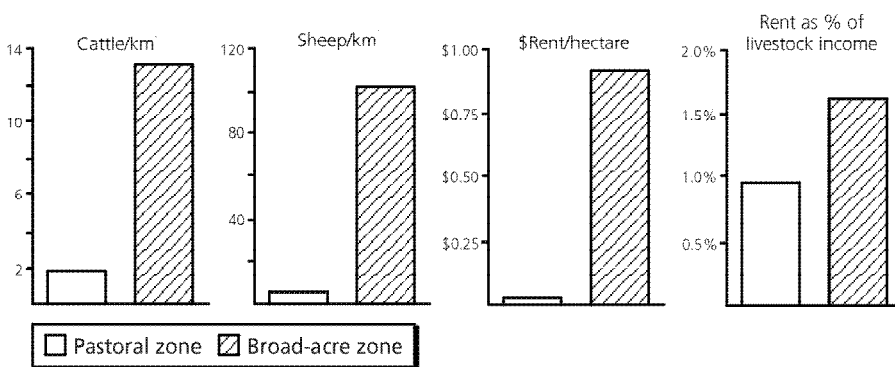
Most cattle are no longer reared entirely on the open range. Cattle reared in the pastoral zone are shipped for fattening to intensive feedlots, which accounted for 73% of industry capacity in 1995–96.⁷⁷

As little as a 15% increase in production efficiency per unit area in the broad-acre zone could completely absorb all of the cattle production which now covers the enormous area of the pastoral zone, degrading soils, destroying wildlife and interfering with the native title rights of Aboriginal claimants.

Ending or redirecting subsidies would end any economic advantage in running cattle at such low densities over huge areas of landscape, with all the damage that results. There may be compelling social reasons to subsidise rural society at the expense of economic efficiency. But the reality is that only government subsidies, especially for transport infrastructure and diesel rebates, prevent all cattle production becoming more intensive.

A sustainable alternative economy is possible for the pastoral zone, as discussed below. It needs only for government to restructure subsidies to favour its evolution.

Figure 4. Pastoral productivity and rents^a



^a See Figure 2 for geography of zones⁷⁶

A new pastoral economy?

It may prove economically and environmentally more sound to end present cattle and sheep production entirely in the pastoral zone, and replace it with careful harvesting of wild populations of kangaroos and other wildlife.

In Queensland, harvesting of wild kangaroos by licensed hunters is regulated by recovery, even under the present pastoral regime, which is dominated by cattle and sheep.⁷⁸

Kangaroo meat prices are higher and the meat leaner and healthier than cattle or sheep meat. Public health risks from disease problems exist, but they are no different than those for cattle and sheep and can be dealt with by the same inspection protocols. Kangaroo and emu farming is growing, and the meat from these native animals enjoys increasing consumer acceptance.

The replacement of introduced stock animals by native animals is, fairly obviously, more favourable to conservation of the native fauna. The biodiversity that was present in Australia before the British invasion was not the product of natural processes alone, but also of the conserving practices of the early Aboriginal hunting economy.

To restate this more clearly, the Aboriginal economy that prevailed before 1788 may now prove to be the only genuinely sustainable economy for the pastoral zone.⁷⁹

The success of Aboriginal-owned tourist industries at Uluru and Kakadu, in central and northern Australia, indicates another viable replacement for the pastoral industry — that of tourism. Many western towns dominated by white councils are now slowly discovering that many foreign tourists in the outback come to see the unique wildlife and the Aboriginal heritage of the area, not cows and sheep, which they can see quite easily in their own countries.

All of these changes in the economy of the pastoral zone could happen in one of two ways. The first involves the present attempt by pastoralists to have it all to themselves, compounding the injustices of the past and entailing wasted years of litigation. The second could be a cooperative enterprise involving both Aboriginal owners and non-Aboriginal leaseholders, a negotiated solution that would give real meaning to the idea of reconciliation.

Conclusion

Throughout this essay I have painted a harsh picture of Queensland's pastoralists. However, as much blame for the record of dispossession and destruction lies with the politicians, financiers and indeed urban society generally, which have benefited from and encouraged the harmful actions of pastoralists. In contrast to financiers and politicians, at least pastoralists have provided society with useful products like meat

and wool.

Time and again, native title claimants stress that they do not want to “own” the land in pastoral leases; they want peaceful coexistence with full recognition of leaseholders’ rights. They want only to exercise their own modest rights of access to and say over the future of their traditional lands for their traditional purposes, rights established even in English common law. Whenever pastoralists listen, Aboriginal claimants have shown their willingness to talk and negotiate.

The peaceful, diligent persistence of Aboriginal people in reclaiming their heritage and culture despite the odds against them shows a dignified courage that should be an inspiration to all Australians.

Gunggari elder Irene Ryder typifies this dignified spirit. Her childhood was spent in a camp without clean water or sanitation on the edge of Mitchell, a town named for the British messenger of doom who “explored” the area in 1846. She described to me the indignity of having to clean the bar in the hotel that she could never enter during opening hours. Amid blatant discrimination and racist taunts for as simple a thing as swimming in the local pool, she found her own opening into the hearts of the white community. She went to the children.

In the early ’80s, with the cooperation of a school teacher, Irene wrote her own book on Gunggari culture, language and geneology and had it accepted into the school curriculum. She wanted the Gunggari children to learn their own heritage. In the process, she also taught the white children new respect for that heritage. Now the former riverside camp has become the Yumba cultural centre, a new tourist attraction for Mitchell. The town that once treated her with careless contempt now cherishes her as an elder, of both black and white.

In like manner, we must abandon forever our racist heritage and lend our efforts to the legitimate claims of the Aboriginal nations. We must take a long hard look at the pastoral industry and at ourselves, recognise the abuses of the land and of Aboriginal rights for what they are, and seek to rectify them through common action.

Notes

- 1 Speech at dinner for Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation, Brisbane, October 4, 1997.
- 2 Actually, “public” lands in Australia are officially “owned” by the monarch of England, hence “crown” land.
- 3 There is a special display dedicated to Kidman in the Stockmans’ Hall of Fame in Longreach in central Queensland. Donald Horne notes that he was “a dealer and exploiter rather than a producer” (*Ideas for a Nation* [Pan, 1989], p128).
- 4 Cable News Network, *CNN Online*, May 16, 1997.
- 5 Henry Reynolds, in the *Courier-Mail*, May 19, 1997.
- 6 *Information Kit for native title supporters*, Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research Action, 1997.
- 7 The *Courier-Mail*, May 17 & June 6, 1997.
- 8 Speech at a dinner by Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation, Brisbane, October 4, 1997.
- 9 *Land Rights Queensland*, September 1997.
- 10 *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 10, 1997; *The Courier Mail*, May 3 & November 1, 1997.
- 11 *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 10, 1997.
- 12 The *Australian*, May 21, 1997.
- 13 The *Courier-Mail*, October 2, 1997.
- 14 Western anthropologists classify the pre-contact Aboriginal economy as *nomadic*, a technical term for an economy based on seasonal shifts through a defined range, without permanent dwellings. The term, however, has long assumed a popular meaning of haphazard wandering and constant hunger. Histories such as Blainey’s *Triumph of the Nomads* (Sun Books, 1975) while valuable in explaining the sophistication of the pre-invasion Aboriginal economy, did so without regard to the popular meaning of *nomad*.
Aborigines-as-nomads was an essential concept for the *terra nullius* (empty land) doctrine of the British invaders. With astounding hypocrisy, people who could well be described as

wandering opportunists turned this very insult on those whom they attacked. British invaders meant no irony in labelling Aborigines as “foreigners”, to be treated like Chinese and Kanaka labourers. Aborigines were not even counted as Australian citizens until 1967, just thirty years ago.

For all that, the early invaders themselves also documented the intense Aboriginal attachment to and deep knowledge of their homeland and of the strict protocols for travel between neighboring territories. Pre-invasion Australia was a finely divided map of 500 tiny nations, an archipelago of productive extractive economies and rich cultures with 50 millennia of roots in the land. Despite this evidence, Aborigines were dismissed as if they had spent the last 50 millennia just “passing through”. This perverse view was, and continues to be, a legitimization of conquest in many white eyes.

- 15 Dawn May, *Aboriginal Labour and the Cattle Industry*, Cambridge, 1994; Ross Fitzgerald, *A History of Queensland: from the Dreaming to 1915*, University of Queensland Press, 1982.
- 16 Quoted in William Lines, *Taming the Great South Land*, Allen & Unwin, 1991, p75.
- 17 Henry Reynolds, *The other Side of the Frontier*, Penguin, 1981.
- 18 Fitzgerald 1982, p 96.
- 19 Henry Reynolds & Dawn May, Ch 4 in Ann McGrath (ed), *Contested Ground*, Allen & Unwin, 1995.
- 20 John Ross, *Rebellion From the Roots*, Common Courage Press, 1995.
- 21 Fitzgerald 1982; Howard Pederson and Banjo Woorunmurra, *Jandamarra and the Bunuba resistance*, Magabala Books, 1995.
- 22 May 1994, p. 184–185.
- 23 The usual apology for such abuses is that social values were different in the past. Human Rights Commission researcher Sarah Pritchard dismisses this ploy by quoting a bureaucrat who expressed his own conviction at the time that they were currently engaged in a “violation of the present day conception of ‘human rights’” (*Australian*, May 21, 1997).
- 24 May 1994, p. 184–185.
- 25 *Queensland County Life*, September 25, 1997.
- 26 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), *Report on Indigenous Deaths in Custody, 1989–96* (1996).
- 27 Lynn Jacobs, *Waste of the West: Public Lands Ranching*, Lynn Jacobs, Tucson Arizona, 1991, p. 14–15.
- 28 Ross 1995.
- 29 Susanna Hecht & Alexander Cockburn, *The Fate of the Forest*, Harper-Collins, 1990.
- 30 Quoted in Fitzgerald 1982, p. 217.
- 31 From Meston’s figures quoted earlier and Queensland Department of Natural Resources,

Annual Report, 1996.

- 32 *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 10, 1997 & *ABC News*, September 10, 1997.
- 33 The Australian Bureau of Agricultural Resource Economics (ABARE) distinguishes among farms in “wheat-sheep” and “high-rainfall” zones producing mostly crops and grains in high to moderate rainfall areas and farms in low rainfall areas that primarily graze animals on publicly owned land, the “pastoral” zone. The former two zones are very similar in production statistics and proportion of freehold land, and have been pooled here into a “broad-acre” farming category. ABARE 1996 *Farm Surveys*, Qld Commissioner of Land Tax 1990, *Annual Report*.
- 34 Ann McGrath, Introduction, *Contested Ground*, 1995.
- 35 Eg, examples cited earlier and the *Courier-Mail*, May 17, 1997, p. 27.
- 36 The *Courier-Mail*, June 7, 1997.
- 37 Reynolds in the *Courier-Mail*, May 19, 1997; also September 20, p. 1.
- 38 The *Courier-Mail*, October 2, 1997, p. 6.
- 39 Federal Department of Primary Industries and Environment, *Australia: State of the Environment*, 1996.
- 40 Quoted by Tony Koch in the *Courier-Mail*, May 24, 1997, p. 23.
- 41 *Australia: State of the Environment*, 1996.
- 42 Reynolds & May 1996, p. 178.
- 43 *Australia: State of the Environment*, 1996.
- 44 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing Them Home*, 1997.
- 45 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, 1997.
- 46 Peter Read, quoted in *Contested Ground*, chapter 5, 1995.
- 47 A common reaction to criticism of the environmental record of the last 210 years is to point to the fact that pre-invasion Aboriginal societies also had environmental impacts. Redirecting blame does not change the facts nor the locus of responsibility for the damage done by the invading society, past or present.
- 48 J. Short & A. Smith, Mammal Decline and Recovery in Australia, *Journal of Mammalogy* 75, 1994, p. 288.
- 49 Foregoing statistics from *Australia: State of the Environment*, 1996. Ch 4; Davies 1983, p. 10; Lines 1991, p. 12. Figures are underestimates because it is only in this century that substantial accounting of the loss began.
- 50 A Bailey (ed), *The Brigalow Belt of Australia* Royal Society of Queensland; Lines 1991, p. 204; Fitzgerald 1982, p. 412.
- 51 J.R. Mills, E.J. Turner and T. Caltabiano, *High Stocking Rates in Mulga*, Queensland Department of Primary Industries Project report, 1989.
- 52 Fitzgerald 1982, p. 206; Short & Smith 1994.

- 53 Department of Natural Resources. *Annual Report 1996*.
- 54 P.J. Corrigan & P. Seneviratna, Occurrence of Organochlorine Residues in Australian Meat, *Australian Veterinary Journal* 67,1990, p. 56; I.D. Robertson, A. Naprasnik & D. Morrow, Sources of Pesticide Contamination in Queensland Livestock, *Australian Veterinary Journal* 67, 1990, p. 152.
- 55 *Australia: State of the Environment*, 1996, fig. 4.6.
- 56 Foregoing from S.M. Wilson, J.A.H. Whitham, U.N. Bhati, D. Horvath & Y.D. Tran, Trees on Farms, *Surveys of Trees on Australian Farms 1993–1994*, ABARE report, 1994.
- 57 Queensland Department of Natural Resources, *Annual Report*, 1996.
- 58 Quoted in Fitzgerald 1982, p. 78.
- 59 Quoted by J. Gasteen, The Changing Face of the Brigalow Lands, *Wildlife Australia* 26, 1994, p. 10.
- 60 Blainey 1975, p. 83.
- 61 Quoted in Lines 1991, p. 96.
- 62 G. Gordon, Fauna of the Brigalow Belt in A Bailey (ed), *The Brigalow Belt of Australia*, Royal Society of Queensland, 1984.
- 63 The following should not be interpreted as simple condemnation of state subsidy for development. The sole purpose is to dispel the myth that pastoralists are rugged individualists who owe their fortunes (or failures) to their efforts alone. Subsidies may or may not be socially beneficial.
- 64 *Queensland Country Life*, September 25, 1997, p. 1.
- 65 Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Agricultural Policies Markets and Trade in OECD Countries: Monitoring and Evaluation 1996*,1996.
- 66 *Sydney Morning Herald*, September 15, 1997.
- 67 The *Courier-Mail*, May 28, 1997.
- 68 P.M. Wolfe, *Report of a review of land policy and administration in Queensland*, Queensland Governmentt Printer, 1990.
- 69 Department of Natural Resources, *Annual Report 1996*.
- 70 K.O. Campbell & R.G. Dumsday, pp. 162–171, in D.B. Williams (ed) *Agriculture in Australia* (3rd edition), Sydney University Press, 1990, & also Wolfe, 1990.
- 71 Wolfe 1990.
- 72 Henry Reynolds in the *Courier Mail*, May 19, 1997.
- 73 OECD 1996; Steering Committee and Task Force on Meat and Livestock Institutional Reform, *Australian Meat and livestock reform for the future*, AGPS, 1996..
- 74 *ABC News*, October 9, 1997
- 75 N.D. McLeod, pp 67–78, in *Australian Rangelands Journal* vol 12, 1994.
- 76 ABARE 1996 *Farm Surveys*.

- 77 Steering Committee and Task Force on Meat and Livestock Institutional Reform, *Australian Meat and Livestock Reform for the Future*, AGPS, 1996.
- 78 J.D. Ovington, *Kangaroo Management Programs of the Australian States*, Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service Report, 1984.
- 79 G. Grigg, pp. 124–128, A.E. Andrew, pp. 138–140, and K. O’Dea, pp. 140–143 in *The Australian Zoologist* vol 24, 1988; & Dr Michael Archer interviewed on *ABC News*, September 1, 1997.

Disclaimer

The views expressed and any errors made in this book are entirely those of the author and not those of any other group or individual.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Elizabeth Dann and Daniele at Queensland Department of Natural Resources Library and to the University of Queensland for providing me with library privileges. Naomi Mudge and Ann McGrath provided valuable editorial advice. Gunggari representatives at the Naralingu office in Mitchell were very generous with their time and knowledge.

IMAGINE that a small group of business people dominated by a few large foreign companies convinced the government to give them control over most of the national landmass, for which they pay token rents.

SUPPOSE that they exterminated indigenous people living there, then coerced the labour of the survivors, destroyed their sacred sites, exterminated wildlife, cut down forests, eroded the soil, fouled waterways and caused desertification.

SUPPOSE they persuaded the government to provide access roads, dams, railways, ports, easy credit, free advice and a host of other subsidies.

SUPPOSE that for the huge area of land degraded they manage to produce what could have been produced on one tenth of the land area.

SUPPOSE that after all this they demand that the government allow them to acquire freehold title to this land, and so frustrate Aboriginal attempts to reclaim their legitimate native title rights.

NOW STOP IMAGINING. This is the real history of the pastoral industry in Australia, and especially Queensland.

Resistance books