

**Welcome Address to
Representatives of the
First Nation People from Canada
by
Logan K Howlett, JP
Mayor, City of Cockburn
In the Function Room, Administration Building,
City of Cockburn
on
Thursday 5 May 2011**

Good Morning and welcome to the City of Cockburn.

I acknowledge the traditional owners of this land that we meet on today, the Noongar people and pay respect to the elders both past and present of the Noongar nation and extend that respect too all indigenous Australians who are present here today.

I acknowledge Reverend Sealin Garlett, Co-Chair of the City of Cockburn's Aboriginal Reference Group and the other members of the Reference Group who are with us here today.

Sealin Garlett contribution in our community and further a field is highly valued as is that of the other members of the City's Aboriginal Reference Group.

I am honoured to welcome to the City of Cockburn two representatives of the First Nation People of Canada, Elder Beatrix Stephens and Ms Jackie Browne. Ms Browne is also a staff member of the Ktunaxa Kinbasket Child and Family Services, in British Columbia, Canada.

We offer our respect to you as First Nations Peoples of Canada and warmly welcome you to Australia, and particularly, to the south west metropolitan region of Perth and the City of Cockburn.

I also welcome:

- Cr Val Oliver, City of Cockburn;

Representatives from the Department of Child Protection:

- Ms. Jacqueline McGowen Jones - Executive Director, Aboriginal Engagement;
- Ms Emma White - District Director of the Fremantle area; and
- other DCP staff members;
- Mr Maurice Agale, the Aboriginal Engagement Officer, City of Fremantle;
- Ms Marissa Vermer, the Aboriginal Engagement Officer, City of Melville;
- Ms Gail Bowman, Manager Human Services, City of Cockburn;
- Ms Jill Zumack, Human Services Operations Manager, City of Cockburn;
- Ms Barbara Freeman, Family Services Manager, City of Cockburn; and other City of Cockburn staff
- Ms Dorothy Petersen – Kwoberup
- Ms Dee Fraser – Kwoberup

The first Nation People of Australia and Canada share amazing similarities in terms of their history, culture and heritage. Both survived in harsh environments for thousands of years.

They respected the environment ensuring that the air, water and land remained unpolluted during that time.

They hunted animals, trapped fish and learnt how to gather berries and other nutritional bush food - knowledge of which has been passed down through the generations.

They were expert hunters and moved through their lands as the seasons changed.

They developed knowledge of the use of plants for medicinal purposes – science today is pursuing the use of many of these remedies as they turn back the clock and explore how first nation people from around the world turned to Mother Nature for their needs.

Importantly, first nation people handed down their knowledge and culture from person to person, generation to generation. Around campfires and during various ceremonial events specific information was passed on in traditional ways.

As is the case everywhere, storytelling was used extensively.

Stories inform, educate, entertain, strengthen family and cultural values and continue as one of the most important ways in which to enrich future generations of those who have gone before them and importantly help in giving guidance and direction for our children and grandchildren.

I often say that Aboriginal people have lived in Australia for over 40,000 years – they respected and valued the environment and yet in the space of the last 222 years what is generally referred to in Australia as European settlement most, if not all, of this has been undone.

Today, it is how we as a nation respond to the damage that has been done that will be the foundation stone for future generations.

Importantly, we need to turn to nurture our most important asset, our children and their families as we begin the journey of recovering our respect and value for the environment.

Wars have been fought for thousands of years. In many cases they have caused needless suffering of families.

On a trip to a Commonwealth war grave site in France in the Year 2000 my wife and I were inspired as the faint sound of children playing at a nearby school drifted across the fields to where we were standing

It was a poignant reminder of war, of suffering, of the unknown and of the impact on families and children.

In today's world we have an opportunity – indeed an obligation to provide a warm, caring and safe environment in which our children can grow and prosper.

The challenges are many, however I believe that using our professional and community networks and sharing information will create an environment such as existed around the campfires of times gone past.

To the first Nation People of Canada here today can I say that we look forward to hearing about the journey that your people have taken, the stories that define your Nation and communities and how we can work together to build a better place for our world, our children and our grandchildren.

Giggling, laughing, running, hopping, skipping, sharing stories in a warm, loving and safe home environment is what every child needs to be able to express.

The allocation of resources, service delivery and importantly, how we engage and support our community and families in maximising the opportunities for our children is paramount.

I commend you for the work that you do in your communities, for the sharing of your stories and the commitment that you bring to the lives of children and families – yesterday, today, tomorrow and into the future.

To Elder Beatrix and Ms Jackie Browne I wish you continued learning while you are in Australia and that you take home memories and stories of our great country Australia that can be shared in your own communities.

Again, welcome to our City - I look forward to speaking with you over the next hour or so.

Thank you.