

# 04 STRONG CULTURE, STRONG ECONOMY

## Warren Mundine's Long Term Vision of the Prime Minister's Indigenous Advi- sory Council

by

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"It goes beyond white politics, beyond the Liberal National and Labor Parties, its about our politics, its about our economic future, its about our health and education, and our safe, stable communities and our children that no longer go to juvenile detention centres and become doctors, lawyers and engineers.. its about our companies and businesses that are growing and moving on to the global stage".

Warren Mundine in his Sydney Office, 27 November 2013

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This interview was released in conjunction with, and discussed exclusively on, the Sandy Dann Morning Show on Radio Goolarri, 99.7FM airing in Broome and across the PAKAM remote area network on December 2 2013

Listen to the full recording of the Interview with Warren Mundine at this link: <https://soundcloud.com/kangarooova/warren-mundine-27-november>

The full recording of the interview with Warren Mundine is available online. *Double click here.* This article and interview is available free to workingpapers subscribers for 4 hours from its release at 1.10pm EST Dec 2, 2013.

## The Prime Ministers Indigenous Advisory Council

Mr Warren Mundine is a member of the Bundjalung and Gumbaynggirr people on the North Coast of New South Wales. He is the Executive Chairman of the Australian Indigenous Chamber of Commerce and has over 26 years' experience working in the public, private and community sectors.

Mr Richard Ah Mat is an indigenous man from the Torres Strait and Cape York and is currently involved in the Cape York Welfare Reform agenda. Mr Ah Mat is currently the Chair of the Cape York Land Council. Prior to this he worked for Comalco Mining in Weipa for 27 years.

Ms Leah Armstrong is a Torres Strait Islander and is the CEO of Reconciliation Australia. Previously, Ms Armstrong established a not-for-profit company called Yarnteen. Ms Armstrong's successful 18 year tenure as the Executive Director was acknowledged in 2012 when she was recognised in the 2012 Australian Financial Review/Westpac 100 Influential Women Awards.

Dr Ngjare Brown is an Aboriginal woman from the south coast of New South Wales and one of the first group of Aboriginal medical graduates in Australia. Dr Brown has previously been Indigenous Health Advisor to the Federal Australian Medical Association and was Foundation CEO of the Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association.

Ms Josephine Cashman is a Koori woman, a descendant of the Worimi people of New South Wales. Ms Cashman is the Managing Director and founder of Riverview Global Partners and has worked in private, government and not-for-profit sectors.

Ms Gail Kelly is the Managing Director and CEO of Westpac. Ms Kelly was the co-founder of Jawun Indigenous Corporate Partnerships and is a non-executive director of

Warren Mundine has a clear vision for the Prime Ministerial Advisory Committee he chairs. He wants to ensure it is above party politics. His view is that Indigenous policy must, so far as is possible, be beyond what he calls "white man's politics".

Mundine is a controversial figure for some in that he accepted Prime Minister Abbott's appointment after being President of the Australian Labor Party. However any controversy seems almost alien to him. He brushes it aside. He is striving to paint a picture on a bigger canvas.

He is quick to note that the committee is not meant to be a representative body. That function he says falls to the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples. Interestingly Mundine does not deride that body as some who are close to the Abbott Government have done. Mundine wants to create a respectful relationship with the Congress. He has a good relationship with several members of the Congress and while he says there may be times there are disagreements, he respects the Congress and the job it has to do.

Even before the government came to office Mundine has been suggesting people to the Prime Minister and he has also been thinking long and hard about how the committee might work and what its main work will be. The main strategic function and the main reason the representatives have been selected is to focus on commercial and economic development.

Mundine's relationship with the Prime Minister has been important in all of this. Clearly they get on well together and clearly Abbott has invested substantially in Mundine in the hope that they can develop a strong, accepted agenda in Indigenous affairs.

Mundine has said of the Prime Minister

'I massively disagreed with his policy in the past,'

'But one thing I did like about him was that he actually sits and takes the criticism on then thinks about it.'

'It's quite clear to me that he has a passion and a very personal determination to make these changes that we need to lift Indigenous people out of poverty and improve their socio-economic life.'

'We need to have good governance going into these communities and this is the main focus of what I'll be looking at if I do the review.'

Since the time Mundine made these remarks the committee has changed from a six month temporary review to a permanent feature of the Abbott government. In fact it is one of the significant demonstrations of statesmanship on Abbott's part. For Mundine there is an unspoken ambition that the Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Committee should become a permanent fixture of Australian government. Its job would be to drive the big changes and to unblock the obstacles within government that are in the way of positive change for Indigenous peoples. It's a very good idea, one that should win the support of all sections of the Aboriginal community.

The big goal for 2014-16 is Aboriginal economic advancement and the ap-

the Business Council of Australia.

Mr Djambawa Marawili AM is an indigenous artist and leader of the Yolngu Madarrpa people and the Baniyala/Yilpara homeland. In 1996 he won the prestigious National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award Best Bark Painting Prize. Mr Marawili is also the Chairman of the Association of Northern Kimberley and Arnhem Aboriginal Artists.

Mr Bruce Martin is a Wik man from Aurukun and is the founder and current CEO of Aak Puul Ngantam, a Cape York organisation building sustainable development and representing families of Watson River south to the Kendall River.

Mr David Peever is the Managing Director of Rio Tinto Australia. He is also the Chairman of the Business Council of Australia's Economic Policy and Competitiveness Committee. Mr Peever is also a member of the Male Champions of Change Advisory Group and a non-executive Director of Cricket Australia.

Mr Andrew Penfold is the current CEO of the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation. Prior to this, Mr Penfold had a successful career in international law and finance. Mr Penfold was awarded an Order of Merit by the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

Professor Peter Shergold AC is the Chancellor of the University of Western Sydney. Professor Shergold is also a current board member of the National Centre for Indigenous Excellence and a former Secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. Prior to this, he was the CEO of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission.

Mr Daniel Tucker is an indigenous man from Kalgoorlie and the founder and Managing Director of Carey Mining, the largest 100 per cent indigenous, privately-owned and managed contracting company in Australia. Mr Tucker was the 2012 Western region winner of the EY Entrepreneur of the Year award.

pointment of each committee member reflect this overall priority. There are some members of the committee who are clearly there for their non-economic and governance expertise but the majority have a focus and priority on economic matters. The appointment of Daniel Tucker, probably Australia's most successful Aboriginal business man and entrepreneur is a significant one, as is the appointment of Westpac's Gail Kelly. The appointment of Djambawa Marawili and Bruce Martin as remote area and homeland representatives indicates that creating economies in these arenas is also an important priority. There is likely to be strong recommendations for the development of particularly Aboriginal small businesses in urban, regional and remote areas

Overall the committee is well balanced and fresh and Mundine is clearly very happy with the people who will be working with him. There are several relatively new faces on the national scene and this too is what Mundine was hoping for.

## II

Mundine says the committee has an important goal of quickening positive change: "There has been a lot of very positive changes occurring around Australia but they are not happening quickly enough.. meanwhile bad developments like juvenile incarceration rates are sprinting.. So we have to boost the pace of positive change and we have to ensure it occurs for a wider number of Aboriginal people".

He goes on:

"No community in the world has ever risen out of poverty without a strong economy .. we need to create jobs, we want Aboriginal community economies to grow and we want to see people moving out of poverty.. that is what we will be working with community leaders to achieve."

Mundine's way of preparing for the committee was to undertake a series of listening tours around Aboriginal Australia. He visited Cape York, East and West Arnhem Land, Central Australia and several other communities.

On these visits he says you have two ears, two eyes and one mouth and you should use them in that proportion. On his listening tour Mundine saw three main priorities: he visited a community in which there were 450 kids of school age and only 50 in school, he was struck by the importance of small business for job creation and he saw that technology was going to be a major bridge between remote and regional communities and the wider world.

On schools significantly Mundine seems to have a very clear view that Indigenous culture and languages need to be taught along with technology, maths, science and English. Not either or but both and in both these spheres the goal is excellence.

In terms of small business and economic development Mundine is under no illusion that demand and investment is needed particularly in remote and regional areas He sees the services and hospitality industries as important opportunity creators for Aboriginal job seekers. Mundine sees social investment bonds as an important means of economic stimulation. But he also wants to lock the committee's work into four or five major government activities:

- Former CBA head David Murray's inquiry into banking
- Josh Frydenberg's inquiry into regulations and legislative impediments to economic activity
- Maurice Payne's economic development committee
- the Forest Review into Aboriginal employment and training
- the Aboriginal Advisory group to the Minerals Council of Australia

and he mentions the idea of looking at the various trusts and royalty funds that have been established since 1975 and freeing them up so that they can act as a stimulus to Aboriginal economic development.

### III

Mundine is excited by the fact that he has strong cooperation from corporate Australia. When asked about concerns that many had about the lack of demand in Aboriginal communities since the demise of CDEP, or alternatively the likelihood of private title diminishing Aboriginal communal title and traditional values, Mundine was frank. He said that since colonisation Aboriginal people had a right to be suspicious of new governments and new committees. He said his committee would be judged by its results. He says "I understand the fear. .. People are fearful that they will be the losers. After all we have had a long history of being the losers. But since Mabo, since the various land rights legislation things have picked up for us.. When I was a child it was unheard of to go to university.. now every child can have that aspiration.. Fifteen years we wouldn't have been talking about social bonds or sovereign funds.. We and when I say we I mean the whole Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community have to grasp these opportunities with both hands."

From all this it seems clear Mundine will be a moderate voice of reason for the Abbott government, he will have consideration for community interests at the forefront of his concerns.

In the final part of the interview Mundine says that there will be up to six meetings of his committee a year. One of them will be in Canberra. But he hopes that the rest of the meetings will be held in regional and remote parts of Australia.

The great winner from Mundine's committee is the government of the day. The idea of a Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Committee is overdue and welcome.

It is an initiative of the Abbott government that most would agree should become a permanent fixture of government. So far so good. But now as Mundine recognises the hard work must begin.

(This article is a summary of the interview with Warren Mundine, however the full interview is available online, you can hear the full unedited discussion at <https://soundcloud.com/kangarooa/warren-mundine-27-november>)