

Launch of the Deakin Indigenous Strategy 2023-2028

Monday, 13 February 2023

Deakin Downtown, Level 12, Tower 2, 727 Collins Street, Melbourne

Vice-Chancellor delivered speech online, from Geelong

[CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY]

Thank you Liz¹, and thank you so many colleagues for joining us.

I'd like to acknowledge Chris Couzens, MP for Geelong, who is such an ally to our First Nations colleagues, and to our region.

Lionel Bamblett, Director of VAEAI, and again a great friend of our institution.

Mark Rose, PVC Indigenous Strategy and Innovation. Professor Rose needs limited introduction as quite an extraordinary individual.

Our PVCs Indigenous from fellow Victorian universities, and members of our Indigenous Advisory Council.

And thank you to Professor Gabi Fletcher, Director of NIKERI.

As Liz has said, I'm joining you from Geelong on Wadawurrung Country today.

It is a day that I would have very much liked to have been with you, but we had a very interesting discussion.

The team felt it was critically important that we launched the strategy on a significant day – and today being the anniversary of the Apology, it was decided that that was the time.

I am involved in two large graduation ceremonies today, so I can't be with you. But as Liz has said, I wasn't going to miss this event for anything.

Our graduation ceremonies are a key part of our university life. But they are also a chance to reflect on many issues, past and present and future.

As we sit in Costa Hall, we reflect on the rich legacy of the wool industry in the history of Australia around the time of Federation.

In front of us is our University mace crafted from Point Henry aluminium, a reminder of the industrial history of 20th century Geelong and Australia.

And we have our brilliant graduates crossing the stage: the best indication of the future of our nation.

¹ Alfred Deakin Professor Liz Johnson, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic

But as we come to the end of the ceremony, Ron Murray and his digeridoo leads the procession from the stage, and it brings our thoughts right, right back to much, much longer to the First Peoples' history of our nation. As we've heard, one that traverses thousands of generations.

I think fusing those historical links are absolutely part of our commitment as a university that we made in this strategic plan to ensure, and I quote, 'to ensure all our endeavours will reflect in Australia's full history and seek to build an inclusive future.'

Our Indigenous Strategy is the mechanism by which we will guide our actions to make those aspirations a reality.

The document sets out a comprehensive action plan across five domains: students, knowledge, employment, community, and whole-of-university.

In shaping this document, many, many people were consulted inside and outside Deakin as the strategy began to evolve and develop. I just today want to offer my heartfelt thanks to all of those who contributed.

In particular, Traditional Owners, members of our Indigenous Advisory Committee, our Indigenous students and our Indigenous staff.

But I do want to call out again Professor Mark Rose, our inaugural Pro Vice-Chancellor of Indigenous Strategy and Innovation whose vision, hard work and sheer wisdom has helped bring this document to life.

Joining with Indigenous communities in raising the voice and the influence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is an essential part of building an inclusive future for Australia.

As a university, we know Deakin, and indeed all universities play an important role.

We are a significant part of the social structure of our past and present, and we will be in the future.

We are places of knowledge and learning and we continue to play an influential role in defining the prominent thinking of the day.

I'm so pleased that they [the VAIEA] endorsed the strategy, and as Liz said, we've adopted Deakin's truly digital-first strategy. You've got the bookmarks with the QR code, so you can access it wherever you are – within and beyond Australia.

Improving the experience of Indigenous Australians is the responsibility of everybody. And Mark, I have listened to his words carefully...he has made that so clear to us on so many occasions.

I wasn't born in this country and for much of my life I didn't live here. But I have to say now, I'm hugely proud to make this country my home.

In writing these words, I reflected on a few things in my life here, whether it was experienced for the first time: the colours of the landscape in Broken Hill, the unbounded extent of the Nullarbor, the simple architectural splendour of the river gum, the smell of rain in a forest; or looking at the awe of seeing a platypus in a river for the first time...the simple magnificence of the wedge-tailed eagle.

This country touches you and seeds into your very being. If I feel this with my very recent connections, how must it be for those families that have walked this way for thousands of generations?

In a tiny way, I feel the significance of connection to country that underpin so much of our past and future.

But what if that...and I feel a tiny bit emotional...what on earth does it mean for our First Nations colleagues?

This strategy is personally one that I'm honoured to be involved with, and has my personal commitment to help make it real.

Together we must work to move Indigenous Knowledges into the fabric of Australian life, to create a harmony with Indigenous voices for a truly shared future.

Once again, thank you all so much for joining with us today.