# Moving forward in truth and hope



** Disclaimer: In this report, Aboriginal refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.*

One year on…

A line of people meanders towards the makeshift stage at a local Perth bookshop. It's a cool September evening, perfect for this intimate setting.

With copies of *Always Was, Always Will Be* in hand, t-shirts of solidarity worn; the line makes its way towards the author at the front.

The author is Thomas Mayo. Mayo is a Kaurareg Aboriginal and Kalkalgal, Erubamle Torres Strait Islander man who lives on Larrakia land in Darwin.

He is also the elected assistant national secretary of the mighty Maritime Union of Australia. Most important of all, Mayo was a signatory to the Uluru Statement from the Heart and since 2017, has campaigned continuously as the leading spokesperson for the Voice to Parliament referendum.

*Always Was, Always Will Be* follows on from *The Voice to Parliament Handbook*, co-authored by Thomas Mayo and Kerry O'Brien and winner of many awards, including the Social Impact Book of the Year at the 2024 Australian Book Industry Awards.

Those lucky to attend this recent book event lean forward as Mayo describes in his usual calm, quiet, yet firm voice what the last 12 months have been for him, post-referendum and during which many Australians have been asking; "What's next?"

As we approach the one-year mark where, as a nation the vote was no for a Voice to Parliament; it is important to remember, as Mayo outlined, that there were almost six million yes votes.

And out of the six million yes voters, there were approximately 70,000 yes campaign volunteers.

Mayo's new book outlines the hope and support that many people have been asking for. Regardless of how an individual

voted, he asks people to read this book with an open mind.

There are many practical steps to move forward, while also examining “the long Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and history of the continent and political struggles across the last century”.

Chapter one is about hope. He sees hope as the “necessary ingredient for change” but also the need to support hope with motivation as an additional key ingredient.

Without motivation to “do good for others, because we feel solidarity, empathy or love … and a desire for fairness”, the “world would spiral into a scary place”.

This is the mantra of the union movement, that unionism stands for a fair and just society and nobody is left behind.

Mayo outlines the importance of tackling the lies and “deeply entrenched” beliefs about Aboriginal people.

In chapter eight, he says: “It’s amazing how vulnerable people can be to a well-crafted and well-disseminated disinformation campaign, yet there are a few legal repercussions for dishonesty in politics”.

Like his previous book, he responds to statements of misinformation that have been circling in mainstream media about Aboriginal people.

He also encourages the reader to “counteract these tactics” by “flooding the zone with truth and hope”.

The book includes a list of resources for a number of genres that can be used as a great teaching tool, community resource and personal use.

The SSTUWA continues to also advocate for the much-needed support for schools to implement the Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework in its entirety.

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Committee members have been leading the conversation with the union on the ongoing need to improve cultural responsiveness in all educational settings and the need to bring back dedicated Aboriginal units in every region to proactively support teaching and learning of Aboriginal students, support Aboriginal educators and help recruit and retain Aboriginal teachers in our system in schools and TAFE colleges.

Furthermore, the SSTUWA is a member of the Reconciliation in Education Leadership Network group. The purpose of the group is to network and provide system change for reconciliation in education, by supporting truth-telling and knowledge around cultural responsiveness through key and shared strategic priorities. The first post-referendum meeting highlighted the importance of defending and upholding the rights of First Nations people.

At the June State Council Conference, delegates were very fortunate to hear from two members of the Reconciliation in Education Network.

The first speaker was Dr Libby Jackson Barrett, a senior lecturer with the School of Education and dean at Kurongkurl Katijin at Edith Cowan University.

The second speaker was Lynda Roberts Hall, acting director of people, culture and safety at North Metropolitan TAFE.

Both speakers shared with State Council delegates their strategic priorities to foster cultural understanding in their workplaces and how this is delivered
to students.

Delegates were very interested in how they can prioritise cultural responsiveness at a local level. It is evident that we need the state government to prioritise cultural responsiveness and truth-telling in all educational settings.

Aboriginal histories and cultures is a Western Australian cross-curricula priority, but the lack of ongoing funding to build resources from a central point is detrimental to its delivery, and thus impacts how schools can fully implement the Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework.

Returning to Mayo’s book, his formula for justice and recognition includes “people power”. And comrades, people power is what the union movement is built on.

We can harness both to ensure that justice, recognition and truth stay at
the forefront of the journey towards
true reconciliation.



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