



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**THE SENATE**  
**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**  
**WITHOUT NOTICE**

**Aboriginal Reconciliation:**  
**Constitutional Preamble**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 29 March 1999**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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## SPEECH

**Date** Monday, 29 March 1999  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Abetz, Sen Eric

**Source** Senate  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Senator ABETZ** (Tas) (3.21 pm)—What we have seen is a hysterical and affected opposition by Senator Reynolds and the Labor Party to a preamble. What Senator Schacht and those on the other side cannot overcome is the fact that they had 13 years in government to deal with this very sensitive issue. Did they ever once come up with a proposal for the Australian people? No, there was absolutely none, because they were too scared or incapable of dealing with such an important decision, with such an important provision for our Constitution. Senator Ferris has just told the Australian people what the preamble actually says at the moment. After having dealt with Labor's economic mess in our first term of government, we are now turning ourselves to some of the other social issues which are of importance to this nation. As a result, early on in this our second term, we are dealing with the issue of the preamble.

Let us have a look at the draft for a national declaration of reconciliation forwarded by the chairperson of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, Evelyn Scott, on 17 March 1999. Paragraph 2 states:

We celebrate the fact that the Aboriginal culture is the oldest living continuous culture on the planet. That culture is still alive. It is sacred, spiritual and practical, a unique way of living in harmony with the land. Through the land and its first peoples, newcomers to this country may taste that spirituality and rejoice in its grandeur.

In the draft preamble to the Constitution, the Prime Minister suggests:

Since time immemorial—

or oldest living continuous culture, according to the draft for a national declaration of reconciliation, which is very similar wording—

our land has been inhabited by Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, who are honoured for their ancient and continuing cultures.

It is virtually identical to what Evelyn Scott and the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation have put forward. Yet there is this affected hysteria from those on the other side who are trying to suggest that the preamble does not do the right thing by our fellow Australians who are our indigenous brothers and sisters. The reality is that that is exactly what the draft preamble is doing.

I suggest to honourable senators opposite that they take a broad view of the Australian population and ask themselves if they want to frame a preamble in the politically correct manner that Kim Beazley suggests, falling over himself to put wheelbarrow load after wheelbarrow load of political correctness before the Australian people. You can bet your bottom dollar that especially in the blue ribbon Labor seats that preamble would be rejected. The Prime Minister is seeking to chart a course not for political correctness but for what the Australian people, as a whole, will reasonably adopt, accept and incorporate into their Constitution to make it a more living document, to make it more representative of the aspirations of the Australian people, as our country exists today.

Indeed, the preamble goes on to talk about the enrichment to this nation provided by migrants. There are a lot of other excellent comments in this preamble—indeed, statements—which enrich our constitutional structure. It will be a great document for all Australians to read and consider when they think about what being Australian means. I suggest to my friends opposite that they stop and think for a while. The next election is not going to be won or lost over the preamble issue, so take a statesmanlike approach to this sensitive issue and, for a change, don't be negative, look at it in a positive light and make a positive contribution to your country, and remember that for 13 years you had the opportunity and failed to deliver one word of preamble. We have given to the Australian people for their consideration a coherent, consistent and acceptable preamble, which is a lot more than Labor ever did and ever will do.