

From: Gen. Sir John Wilton (R.L.)
11 Melbourne Ave
Forrest, A.C.T. 2603

15th May, 1980

The National President
The Returned Services League of Australia

Dear Sir William,

Many thanks for your letter of 3 Apr notifying me of the National Executive's decision on the possibility of my addressing them on the question of Aboriginal rights.

If it had been possible to address the National Executive, I would have stressed to them that I was not seeking financial support from, or direct involvement by, the R.S.L. Rather, I am seeking their moral support for the efforts of the Aboriginal Treaty Committee and others, to obtain justice and fair treatment for Aboriginals and statutory recognition by Federal and State governments for Aboriginal rights covering the following matters:

1. The protection of Aboriginal identity, languages, law and culture;
2. The recognition and restoration of rights to land, by applying throughout Australia the recommendations of the Woodward Commission;
3. The conditions governing mining and exploitation of other national resources on Aboriginal land;
4. Compensation to Aboriginal Australians for the loss of traditional lands, and for damage to those lands and to their traditional way of life;
5. The right of Aboriginal Australians to control their own affairs and to establish their own associations for this purpose.

In my address, I could also have referred briefly to the following:

—The increasing significance of the Aboriginal Rights question in International forums and therefore to our Foreign Affairs and Defence policies, particularly in the general region of S.E. Asia and surrounding waters —which is of such strategic importance to Australia.

—Should a direct threat to Australian territory arise in the future, the Aboriginal communities in the North and Northwest of Australia would have an important role to play in plans for early warning and reconnaissance. It is therefore important that this willing cooperation in future be ensured.

—National unity and patriotism are essential prerequisites for Australia's defence and future security. When considering these matters, the Australian Aboriginals must be included because they are a widespread and significant part of the population of Australia.

Although the National Executive considered that the question of Aboriginal Rights was not reasonably within the guidelines of the National Constitution of the R.S.L. and well outside the League's areas of activity, I believe that it is an important National issue on which the R.S.L. may consider it desirable to express a view.

If such is the case, I suggest that the National Executive consider passing a resolution expressing support in principle for Aboriginal rights, covering the five matters referred to above. Such a resolution when made known to sub-branches could have an important influence in the community in which they are located as well as on the Federal and State governments.

In my opinion the passing of such a resolution would be consistent with the leadership role which the R.S.L. has played in relation to many relevant issues in the past and I believe would be expected, by Its supporters, to play in the future.

Since the March meeting of the National Executive, you and the President of each of the State branches have been sent a letter from me enclosing a copy of the book *It's Coming Yet* by Stewart Harris. So far, I have received sympathetic and favourable responses from Sir Colin Hynes and Mr Bruce Buxton. I am hoping that I shall get favourable acknowledgments from the other State Presidents.

Yours sincerely,

J.G. Wilton