

Rudd pledges \$100k, vows to 'keep the bastards honest' on closing the gap

Date: November 11, 2015



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Former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd says Malcolm Turnbull must deal with "serious nutjobs" in the Liberal Party's "lunar right". Courtesy *The Project*, 6.30pm weekdays on Ten.

Kevin Rudd has put his authority and his money behind an effort to monitor the effectiveness of policies aimed at closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage and hold politicians accountable.

The former prime minister's National Apology Foundation is behind the setting up of a permanent chair at the Australian National University to carry out the work.



Former prime minister Kevin Rudd with Yirrkala Indigenous leaders.

"To be blunt, whoever the future government of Australia happens to be, we want to keep the bastards honest," Mr Rudd said in a lecture at the university on Wednesday.

"We want to ensure the necessary data is collected to measure our success or failure in bridging the inter-generational gap of entrenched Indigenous advantage. This mission must continue beyond the passing seasons that we call politics."

Mr Rudd has been told the project would require a \$5 million endowment and said he would make an initial "personal contribution" of \$100,000.

He used the lecture to express concern that the push for constitutional recognition of Indigenous Australians could lose momentum and "degenerate into a political bun fight". He also warned that the world will conclude the "ghosts of White Australia" have returned in a different form if the referendum is defeated.

"We should be very wary of the risks of political dissipation as other priorities emerge, or as the political process concludes that consensus on recognition is deemed too politically difficult or simply impossible," Mr Rudd said.

The warning came as Malcolm Turnbull and Bill Shorten are still to agree on the final make-up of the Referendum Council that will drive the process.

Mr Rudd described the degree of difficulty involved in recognition as much greater than he confronted when delivering the national apology in 2008.

"The vicissitudes of the House, in which the government commands a majority, is little compared with the vicissitudes of public opinion, if and when a politically effective 'no' case is mounted, irrespective of whether it is formally endorsed by one political party or another," he said.

"The race demon has not yet been fully exorcised or expunged from our national soul."

Mr Rudd said he respected the views of Indigenous Australians who have warned against a "triumph of symbols over substance" and does not intend to argue for a minimalist approach to change.

"I believe the new Prime Minister has an open mind on these questions and unless I am proven to be wrong, has a deep empathy for Indigenous Australians," he said.

Mr Rudd offered a global perspective on the issue, saying reconciliation was a challenge not just for Australia, but for the 350 million indigenous peoples of the world and their countries.

"The sad reality is that many countries have simply given up on the universal moral challenge of reconciling with their indigenous peoples. Sometimes this is the product of indifference. In others, it is a question of political inconvenience," he said.

"For others still there is a sense of 'learned helplessness': that because Indigenous disadvantage has become so entrenched, simply nothing works. Let Australia yield to none of these."

Read more: <http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/kevin-rudd-warns-indigenous-recognition-could-degenerate-into-a-political-bun-fight-20151111-gkw9ai#ixzz3xHnGMISU>