

Dr. Shane Howard
PO Box 200
PORT FAIRY VIC 3284

The Governor-General
Government House
Dunrossil Drive
YARRALUMLA ACT 2600

October 17th, 2023

Dear Governor-General,

With deep sadness, I write to inform you that in the wake of the failure of the Referendum on the Voice to Parliament, I no longer have faith that our nation will achieve meaningful truth-telling and justice with our First Peoples.

I respect the democratic result but fear that Australians have missed an important historical moment of destiny.

At this point in history, I can't be proud of my nation and I feel honour bound to return my Order of Australia Medal.

At its heart, this is an Aboriginal country. First Nations people watched Ice Ages come and go. Ancient Songlines re-enact the deep history of the oldest continuous culture and spirituality on Earth.

When I wrote the song, 'Solid Rock, Sacred Ground', 40 years ago, I dreamt of a country respectful of our ancient history and honest about our modern history. I wanted to be proud of my country. I wanted us to address the fundamental lie at the heart of our national story and reap the benefits that would flow from that honesty.

Colonisation was brutal for Aboriginal people and the hurt is deep. It marks when they began to lose just about everything. The prosperity and privilege we enjoy in this country comes on the back of immeasurable suffering, unconscionable theft and abuse of First Peoples. The opportunity to meaningfully address those historical wrongs has been dealt yet another terrible blow with the Voice Referendum defeat.

I am also deeply troubled by the way our First Peoples, our brothers and sisters, have been so belittled, with such pernicious vilification, in the interests of political power. It is neither generous nor decent of us as a nation.

In the Referendum campaign, we witnessed the rise of well-resourced and intentional 'disinformation' networks, eroding democratic principles and decency. This should have been an ethical debate, not a political one.

My great grandfather was arrested at the Eureka Stockade and, despite colonial limitations, I hold sacred the democratic principles of the Ballarat Reform League and the freedoms that those Diggers defended and died for.

I believe those sacrifices and principles were compromised in the Voice Referendum campaign by 'disinformation' campaigners. This heralds a new era that diminishes us all and weakens our democratic institutions. I worry for our nation's future.

With all due respect, I believe that until we loose ourselves from our colonial shackles, engage in meaningful Truth-Telling and Treaty-Making with our First Peoples and begin the journey to a 'post-colonial' independent Republic, I cannot be proud of my nation.

I love my birth country deeply and I will continue to do all I can to advocate for this country, for our First Peoples and their deep history and for truth-telling, decency and justice, for all our citizens, as I believe these are the essential foundation stones of an honourable nation, worthy of bequeathing to our children and grandchildren, as well as hope.

Faithfully,

Dr. Shane Howard.