

To Chairwoman of ABC Board, Ms Ita Buttrose and Managing Director David Anderson

I requested the content of this letter to be discussed at your next Board meeting, please.

To whom it may concern,

My name is Josephine Cashman. I support a united Australia. I am a Warrimay woman from the mid north coast of New South Wales. I am a lawyer, businesswoman, orator, media commentator and Managing Director of the Big River group. I was an inaugural member of the Prime Minister Abbott's, Indigenous Advisory Council and served as the Chair of its Safe Communities Committee until 2017. I sit on the Board of the Reconciliation Working Group, Google Australia, the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust and I have been appointed to the Senior Advisory Group, established to ensure Indigenous voices are heard.

I have appeared on The Drum representing Aboriginal people on many occasions and on Q&A once. I am committed to serving the voiceless Aboriginal people on the ground in consultation with elders and traditional owners. In 2011, I was honoured to accept an offer to participate in a sacred and ancient initiation ceremony held at Dhalinybuy homeland, East Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory. It was a privilege to participate and it was a life transforming encounter. This sacred experience has motivated me to serve my people to the best of my ability.

I am writing to the ABC about the promotion of Bruce Pascoe, particularly his book Dark Emu and its related publications. I am especially concerned about the scheduled upcoming documentary based on the book and the children's version being distributed to infant and primary schools. The ABC continues to advertise and support Pascoe, despite the fact eminent historian Professor Geoffrey Blainey, other notable scholars and writers, Jacinta Price and myself have appeared on Foxtel opposing Pascoe's absurd and nonsensical claims. Two books and many articles have been published proving Pascoe has provided no historical evidence. In fact, Pascoe has distorted and/or misquoted valuable explorer records to suit his theories. Nonetheless, the ABC, SBS and NTV continue to promote Pascoe, his publications and it does not end there!

The fact so many privileged Australians choose to turn a blind eye to Pascoe's serious historical misrepresentations, especially the invention of facts about Aboriginal culture he calls, Aboriginal Agriculture without supporting evidence, is beyond belief. Bitter Harvest written by Peter O'Brien holds serious misgivings about Pascoe and his claims. O'Brien is familiar with the diaries and journals of the early Australian explorers, Charles Sturt and Thomas Mitchell and his conclusions are not flattering, Dark Emu is, 'an egregious deception' and 'a rich ragout of grievance'. 'Almost every significant claim that Pascoe makes that is sourced, turns out to be either false or misrepresented.' He continues, 'As purported history, Dark Emu is worthless. Even worse, it promotes a divisive, victim based agenda that pits one Australian against another.' Indeed and the ramifications of Pascoe's misrepresentations should never be dismissed.

Young Dark Emu is the children's version which the ABC promotes on television and on its website. To add salt to my wounds, this version is being distributed to Australian infant and primary schools. Is the ABC not aware it is harmful to misrepresent facts or put bluntly: lie to young children? There must be serious consequences.

The fact our \$1 billion, publicly funded ABC corporation continues to support a man claiming Aboriginal heritage he has been unable to validate. This is beyond unacceptable and something Aboriginal people on the ground find offensive and unfortunately, common practice. Of course my people have no access to the media and/or possess the skills to speak out about this growing problem. However the three Aboriginal communities Pascoe claims to belong to: the Yuin people from the south coast of NSW; the Boonwurrung (commonly written as Bunurong) people from Victoria and the Tasmanian traditional owners, have each rejected his claims in writing. Pascoe has previously claimed he belonged to the Wathaurong people.

It is also shameful the ABC continues to support a magnified distortion of historical evidence which I find especially offensive. Pascoe also claims the financial proceeds from his bush food enterprise (which has appropriated the Yuin sacred Unbarra duck image for its logo) are channelled to support Aboriginal Agriculture! I am wondering what it means and I wonder why Yuin people are not benefiting from Pascoe's use of their sacred umbarra.

It is profoundly upsetting cultural misrepresentations can be actively promoted anywhere, especially at our valued Australian institutions such as universities, schools and on our public broadcasting network. Outrageous Pascoe claims are published and promoted by the ABC, SBS and NTV, without anthropological and/or archaeological evidence! Pascoe's claims are also in contradiction to Aboriginal sacred beliefs which have been passed from generation to generation during ancient ceremonies which have survived the ravages of time, especially the arrival of the British which obviously caused unimaginable disruptions. Despite this, Aboriginal cultural practices have survived which in itself, is remarkable. The Australian Aboriginal culture is the oldest living cultures in the world and Aboriginal people are proud of our hunter and gatherer heritage.

Let me assure the ABC (and the other broadcasters involved), there is a growing number of voiceless Aboriginal people living on the ground who are profoundly offended by Pascoe's ridiculous claims. Pascoe has admitted these

theories were plagiarised and worse, his false claims seriously undermine our sacred and precious Aboriginal creation stories; the purpose of our ceremonial dances and ancient spiritual body paintings; our storytelling traditions and other valued cultural knowledge and philosophies. Our knowledge has been passed by word of mouth from generation to generation. The national broadcaster, SBS and NTV are confusing my people and the Australian population. They are devaluing the achievements of our proud Aboriginal hunter and gatherer heritage. Aboriginal people sustained a healthy and sustainable relationship with nature. We drank from pristine streams, rivers and waterways and we lived in harmony and cooperated with nature for thousands of years. We undertook slow burning practices so our native species which need fire to germinate (something not to be dismissed lightly) could flourish and sustain our populations without harm.

It would appear many Australians have forgotten there were no hoofed animals living on our continent when the British arrived and it would also appear relationships with animals must influence human development. Our native flora, fauna and marsupial mammals are unique. I cannot think of one native animal that could be harnessed to plough the earth and/or lug heavy stones or other building materials needed to construct houses, wells, fences and silos, as Pascoe claims. For what purpose? Aboriginal people had no need to build wells, silos and houses because we roamed the earth in an orderly fashion which anthropologists and archaeologists have researched and documented. They have forensically studied our culture and archaeologists continue to find evidence of our sustained history as hunter gatherers on this magical continent.

I emphasise, Aboriginal people are proud of our hunter and gatherer heritage and it is embedded in our creation stories. We did not need wells to store water because our rivers, creeks and waterways were pure to drink from, imagine that! I understand it is difficult for some to imagine Australia before the British arrived because it changed our landscape forever, in ways many contemporary Australians appear not to consider valid. It has been proven hundreds of indigenous fruits, berries, veggies, roots and other eatable plants are now extinct and obviously lantana, blackberry and other forest plant pests have been introduced! This is one reason why the explorer records and the native species drawings and descriptions of Joseph Banks are valuable and treasured documents. Historical facts should never be allowed to be distorted.

Yet Pascoe has received two literary awards for Dark Emu; he has been nominated for a Human Rights award; he has attracted the support of the ABC, SBS, NTV, UTS and other academic institutions for distorting and/or changing explorer records to suit his theories and more. Pascoe has attempted to change Australian history recordings and Aboriginal cultural practices (without evidence) as our politicians and journalists turn a blind eye. Changing reference quotes in itself is a serious misrepresentation of valued academic principles.

Pascoe has no substantial academic qualifications either, yet he has been appointed as a Professor to the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) and has held many ancillary academic positions. I have submitted a complaint to UTS, demanding an investigation into Pascoe's academic credentials, Aboriginal heritage claims and his outrageous historical distortions about Aboriginal cultural practices and lifestyles. My request has been rejected however I will not be giving in. Pascoe has also attracted significant financial benefit from claiming to be an Aboriginal person and for distorting Aboriginal cultural practices and Australian historical facts! Dark Emu is expected to earn more revenue than Sally Morgan's My Place soon!

Aboriginal communities across Australia are upset about the promotion of Pascoe as an Aboriginal person and his false claims. Dark Emu has upset eminent Professor Geoffrey Blainey and other Australian historians, writers and Aboriginal cultural/spiritual leaders. Pascoe claims Aboriginal people penned animals in back yards next to houses! Imagine penning kangaroos and emus! Imagine a kangaroo or an emu ploughing the earth and/or riding them! What would a plough have looked like? Aboriginal people did not have steel or wire. What materials would Aboriginal people have used to build houses and fences? Aboriginal people had no need to pen animals for obvious reasons. What animals would Aboriginal people have used to support the kind of technologies Pascoe claims were practiced before the British arrived? According to Pascoe, explorer records do not matter and the diaries of Captain Cook, Arthur Phillip, Joseph Banks and others do not matter. I remind you, Australian indigenous animals are kangaroos, emus, echidnas, platypuses, koala bears, crocodiles, bandicoots, possums, bats, native rats, lizards and snakes, to name some! Of course Aboriginal people used sustainable technologies including fish traps, temporary shelters and clothing, but not the kind Pascoe claims. Of course we stored grains, but not in silos!

The explorers and historians have left detailed descriptions of the manner in which Aboriginal people stored grains. What materials would Aboriginal people have used to build a silo? How would we have carried stones and other heavy materials without the aid of animals? Human evolution from hunter gatherers is obviously dependent upon animals to plough the earth, move heavy objects and facilitate sensible transportation. Australian native animals simply do not offer these capabilities. Can you imagine an indigenous animal capable of such feats? Australia has been blessed. Aboriginal people have made an indelible mark upon our sacred land and it would be wise for contemporary decision makers to reference our practical and ancient knowledge such as slow burning which is especially relevant this 2019/2020 summer.

There were no hoofed horses, donkeys, cows, cattle, buffalo, camels, sheep, pigs, goats et al before the British arrived and researchers debate whether dingos are in fact native. Nonetheless, it would be impossible to harness a dingo to plough the earth! Seriously, it is impossible to move from hunter gatherers to farmers without the support of animals and other technologies such as iron and steel. It takes a long time to grind stone into sharp objects by hand, to weave baskets by hand and to reach destinations on foot. Pascoe's theories are illogical and despite the

fact he has offered no evidence, he has gained praise and awards for his claims!

The people of Australia (especially Aboriginal people) deserve an apology from the ABC and the other institutions supporting Pascoe. Apologies should also involve the publishing companies, the print media, SBS, NTV, the award panels, universities, academics, journalists and politicians. I request the ABC immediately withdraw promoting Pascoe and his publications on television and on its website. I also suggest an apology address to the nation might be in order. This could be from the Managing Director, the Chair of the Board, Ita Buttrose or perhaps both could address the nation. Such an event could be held at the National Press Club or a similar venue. I also suggest ABC staff (journalists and others) who have publicly promoted and supported Pascoe deserve to be reminded. Some staff also deserve to be removed from positions of authority and leadership.

I remind those of you who may think there could never be consequences for distorting historical facts and Aboriginal cultural heritage that you are wrong. I invite you to contemplate the fact contemporary Aboriginal people living in communities across Australia are struggling to cope with growing numbers of false Aboriginal heritage claims; fraudsters; child abuse offenders; housing overcrowding; family separations; high incarceration rates; domestic violence; poverty and access to the economic advantages privileged Australians take for granted. There is a relationship between the misrepresentation of the facts and the challenges Aboriginal people face on the ground. The reach of distorting facts should never be underestimated or dismissed.

Frankly the claim Aboriginal people were not hunter and gatherers has undermined our proud Aboriginal cultural heritage, cultural practices and beliefs. It is encouraging Aboriginal children to feel shameful about this proud heritage. After all, all human beings were originally descendants from hunter gatherers.

I would appreciate your immediate attention please.

Yours sincerely,

Josephine Cashman

4 attachments

