

Date: 08 August 2017
Time: 07:13 AM
Station: ABC Goldfields WA
Program: Breakfast
Subject: Interview with Reconciliation WA CEO James Back

MEDIA TRANSCRIPT

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Bettina Arrow

Now Northern Star Resources has sponsored the installation of a second flagpole at Centennial Park to fly the Aboriginal flag. They approached the City of Kalgoorlie/Boulder to get the installation to occur. The City says they're hoping to expand on the flagpole and actually create a community art installation that generations young and old can get involved with to tell their stories. So is this a step forward for our community? Well, to discuss this I am joined by Reconciliation WA CEO, James Back – good morning to you.

James Back

Good morning, Bettina, how are you?

Bettina Arrow

I'm well, thank you, and thank you for joining us so early on a Tuesday morning. Now I might start off by asking, what's your response to a resources company proactively approaching the City to install this second flagpole?

James Back

Bettina, I think it is long, long over that the City of Kalgoorlie/Boulder flies the Aboriginal flag. I think it's a fantastic symbol of a much brighter future ahead. I think the Northern Star have certainly shown a lot of leadership in approaching the council to do exactly this, and I think the council's vision for a better relationship with the local people and those coming in from out of town to access the services around Kalgoorlie/Boulder is a respectful one.

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You did say you think it's long overdue. What do you think about the timing of this announcement?

James Back

Look, I think it's very tough times in Kalgoorlie, and speaking to a lot of community members, you know, it needs to change, and there is, you know, there's a lot of raw emotion there at the moment as you all know. But I think that everyone wants a better deal out of this, and the flying of a flagpole, you know, is a very powerful symbol, and you know, as you're very aware, you know, the symbolism of ANZAC Day and Christmas, the power of these symbols are very significant, and I look forward to seeing a change in the relationships that exist out there presently.

Bettina Arrow

So how important do you believe this installation will be in terms of importance to the wider community?

James Back

I think it's an opportunity to reshape the discourse, and you know, my experience of Aboriginal Australia, I spent seven years out in Martu country north of the Great Sandy Desert and the Western Desert, and there's just such a huge and open willingness of the traditional owners to share their culture, you know, which has kept them alive for 60 or 70,000 years in some pretty rough country at times. So there's a huge willingness to share that and for all Australians to own and take part in what is the world's longest-living culture.

Bettina Arrow

Well, it is hoped that a community art project may also come along with the installation of this second flagpole and flag. How could that be beneficial?

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Yeah, Bettina, I think that's a really exciting component of this particular project. Northern Star are working with Country Arts WA and the City to bring young people together, I believe, during the next school holidays to share their story, and you know, take their pictures of perhaps what a reconciled space looks like out that way. I think it's an opportunity for everyone to come together and celebrate their diversity, and I think that those collaborative art pieces are a beautiful story for all to see moving into the future.

Bettina Arrow

Is it a way for different generations to communicate their feelings as well?

James Back

Absolutely, absolutely, I think, you know, the different generations can get together, you know, in a safe space and just start telling stories, and you know, the sooner people appreciate that we all have more in common than we don't, you know, the sooner we can get on with living the good solid lives that we all wish to live – healthy, fruitful lives.

Bettina Arrow

Well, if you have just joined us on ABC Goldfields my name's Bettina Arrow and I'm speaking with Reconciliation WA CEO, James Back, about the fact Northern Star Resources has sponsored the installation of a second flagpole at Centennial Park to fly the Aboriginal flag, and it has just gone 17 minutes past seven on your Tuesday morning.

So you've been in touch with different people from our region, what have you maybe been hearing about wanting to find a way forward and to bring the community together?

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Bettina, you know, across the State, and particularly as has been highlighted in Kalgoorlie recently, I think, you know, the issue of our relationships with our first people is a really, really complex one. People want to do things differently, and I guess they want better social and economic outcomes for them, for everyone to come together as a community. So the reconciliation model is based on relationships, and through good relationships comes respect, and out of respect comes opportunities, and certainly, you know, very much a two-way street but, you know, we all need to look at our race relations, the historical acceptance, the journey to date, and I think the flagpole opportunity is a great, great show of leadership around providing an opportunity for people to share those stories about, you know what, what has it taken to get to here today, and for a lot of the Aboriginal people in and around Kalgoorlie, it's been a really tough journey of dispossession and dislocation, and there's a lot of healing to be done within the Aboriginal community as a result of that, and certainly as is evident, in the broader community in Kalgoorlie.

Bettina Arrow

Now does your organisation maybe have any plans to come to Kalgoorlie to organise community events or discussions at all?

James Back

Loo, a number of board members, or one board member particularly who has family out that way, and we've, in our speakings with community, have been invited out to Kalgoorlie. We're a really small and under-resourced organisation, unfortunately, but we've got a number of organisations with reconciliation action plans and commitments to reconciliation, and I believe the council are looking at exploring having us come out and do some workshops with community to look at what the future might look like, and I guess a road map to get there.

So it's certainly our intent to progress those conversations and if it's something that the community can see value in we'll certainly be taking the opportunity to do so, Bettina.

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Before I do let you go I might just end by asking what else would you like to see in the future when it comes to reconciliation happening? What would you like to see from governments at different levels, so local, state and federally?

James Back

So I guess the big thing for me is it's a team game, and we're not going to get there simply with corporate leadership. I think it's amazing that, you know, they're driving this and I think the first step is often the hardest, so it's wonderful again that Northern Star have stuck their hand up to do that and the community have come on board with that, the City's on board with that.

I think it's imperative that, you know, the local government are driving this, they're the coalface to community, but the state government and federal government need to be at the table there, the machines of our country, and I think, you know, local government and corporate support is only going to get us so far, we really need that state and federal investment to help drive change. So looking at all the social and economic opportunities that might come out of that, be it employment, be it the provision of more Aboriginal goods and services, yeah, it's changing the social and economic status and lay of the land out that way.

Bettina Arrow

Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me this morning.

James Back

Beautiful, Bettina, thank you.

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That's Reconciliation WA's CEO, James Back, speaking there, and we were talking off the back of the fact Northern Star Resources has proactively approached the City of Kalgoorlie/Boulder and sponsored the installation of a second flagpole at Centennial Park to fly the Aboriginal flag.

You are on ABC Goldfields this morning, it's gone 12 past seven.