

New agenda: We need fair responsible and honest leadership



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governments and resource development companies would not be allowed to do what they're doing in regional and remote parts of Australia.

The farmers have had enough, they're demanding the right to 'lock the gate' to effectively 'veto' resource development in their rich farming regions. Food security and the sustainability of water resources are fundamental issues emerging in the 21st century for both farmers and Traditional Owners. At the 'National Press Club' (19/10/11) Alan Jones spoke up for protecting the land. He strongly emphasized the need to protect precious water assets over the short term interests of resource development as did Malcolm Turnbull on 'Q & A' (15/8/11). Both men argue a strong, clear and logical case as to why Australia should not use hazardous and destructive resource development practices.

Mr Jones did make the point he was not against the resource extraction techniques. He suggested they could be done in more remote places, just not in the places he values.

Recognition of Native Title as a notional concept across Australia was supposed to extinguish the doctrine of Terra Nullius. I am not particularly surprised Alan Jones doesn't value Aboriginal people's occupation and use of land in remote areas however I am concerned political leadership in Australia has not embraced either the legal or moral recognition of Native Title.

The Native Title Act (1993) (Act) was initially a poor compromise for Indigenous Australians that was further diminished when amended by John Howard's 10 Point Plan (1997). Successive state and national governments have failed to embrace the true spirit of reconciliation as they desperately try to mitigate against the impact of Native Title responsibilities. While ever governments deny Native Title holders the right to 'veto' mining on their land, there is no requirement for corporations or governments to negotiate in good faith with Traditional Owners.

Aboriginal people in the Kimberley have no opportunity to say "no" under existing laws and practices. Traditional Owners are told they have no right to veto so they had better get on and negotiate the best deal they can even if it means destroying the river, land or coast or whatever it is that is the repository of their family's eternal ancestry spirit.

There is so much evidence regarding the

multiple dangers associated with resource industries that there should be an immediate moratorium on dangerous extraction and processing techniques. Furthermore, there needs to be a serious investigation into the way resource companies, governments and representative bodies engage with Traditional Owners.

The resource industry has a history of corruption and conflict between Traditional Owners and development corporations around the world. Matthew Benns has recently released a book "Dirty Money: The True Cost of Australia's Mineral Boom" (ISBN:978 1 74275 000 2 (pbk.)) about greed, pollution and murder in regards to the resources industry. Benns provides clear examples of the types of ethics and practices resource corporations are prepared to stoop to acquire a profit. The argument justifying resource development continually changes to suit political interests. For example we have been told we need mining to create jobs, and then we are told we have to get foreign workers to take the jobs. We are told it will stimulate industry yet most of the construction will be done overseas.

There is so much evidence from around Australia and around the world that demonstrates resource extraction is a dirty game.

The resources boom has seen a re-emergence of the worst of Australia's predatory colonial obsession. State and federal governments are supporting the deliberate manipulation of Aboriginal people into agreeing to be exposed to contaminated air and water and having their cultural and recreational environment destroyed.

The first tool of manipulation is withholding the power of veto, then the government withholds financial and human resources. Next, Indigenous resource development facilitators are installed to create a sense of hopelessness so that Traditional Owners have no option but to concede to the developers will. Tucked away in remote communities, without the protection of independent observers or interpreters Traditional Owners are told that if they don't support development they will condemn their communities to a continued future of abject poverty. But ... if they agree to extraction and/or processing they will be rich.

Most Aboriginal people I know don't aspire to be particularly rich however there is no choice; all most people want is the services

that are already available to other Australians. Despite the bullying and alienation many Aboriginal people choose protection of country over promises of wealth.

There is a trick, a deception that governments use to make it look like they are doing more when they are not. They call it re-badging, they withdraw the funding from an existing program and repackage it, launch under a new name. The buzz word is reform; welfare reform, economic reform the list goes on. Historically reform in Aboriginal affairs has been driven by non-Indigenous political interests to the detriment of Aboriginal people. Whether it is called reform or intervention or heads of agreement, the government policies are becoming increasingly repressive while at the same time reducing funding from Indigenous programs.

I haven't been able to get a clear explanation of the new private enterprise model for Indigenous development in the Kimberley but from what I have seen it is a very risky venture as the government and Aboriginal facilitators attempt to shift the Aboriginal economy from government welfare to corporate welfare, with funding raised from the destruction of their own land. There are no safeguards, no evaluation processes in place to monitor the process or outcomes.

The 1.4 billion spread over 30-50 years deal at the centre of the Walmadany-James Prices Point LNG development proposal near Broome is a clear example of why independent international monitors need to be involved in resource negotiations.

There are so many doggy aspects to this project regarding the manipulation of the Traditional Owners rights. Only 300 out of a possible 1300 had access to voting. Traditional owners who are acknowledged as the keepers of customary law have been removed from the claim and others with legitimate connection to that country are denied access to joining the claim. The bullying threats from State Premier Barnett regarding the compulsory acquisition of Aboriginal land for a private developer has forced some Traditional Owners to agree to a pittance in comparison with the trillions of dollars that the corporations and governments hope to get throughout the life of the project.

Indigenous Australians are central to the resource development discussion because most projects plan to use Aboriginal land. Governments have established laws and processes which favour those Aboriginal people who promote resource development.

There are strong differences of opinion within Traditional Owner groups regarding the direction and process of resource development in the Kimberley. The tragedy of our national political leadership is they are so blindly focused a particular economic development strategy that they overlook their legal and ethical responsibility to ensure fair treatment for Indigenous people and their country. There are other reasonable - reasonable and rational - choices to be made by including more diverse views regarding managing country.

At Walmadany all the corporations should follow Shell's world's best practice by processing the gas off-shore. Surely the state and federal governments can negotiate a reasonable tax/royalties split in order to save a world treasure. And maybe they could invest some of the money into the regions where the greatest need in our nation is. Australia cannot continue such an unethical and veracious resource development agenda. There is no sense to it.

There are many Australians standing up for country; we need fair, responsible and honest leadership.

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Traditional owner Phillip Roe, of the Goolarabooloo Jabirr Jabirr people at James Price Point, north of Broome in Western Australia, where the \$30 billion liquefied natural gas hub is proposed to be built by Woodside Petroleum at the point. (AAP Image/Dan Peled)