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ABORIGINES AND ARCHAEOLOGISTS

Some thoughts following the prehistory conference held at Kioloa, NSW (2-5 April 1979)

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The prehistory conference held at Kioloa uncovered several important points for both archaeologists and Aborigines:

1. The need for consultation with Aboriginal people and their communities and Aboriginal organisations, about matters that involve them, is gaining more importance among both archaeologists and Aboriginal people.

2. Connected with this is the increasing need for archaeologists to return the information they uncover to the relevant communities. This information is to be in a form that is understandable to the community it relates to. This could mean that the document may have to be produced in the language of the community, or in a form without jargonistic terms and direct in its meaning. This obviously involves extra time and effort on the part of researchers but it would be time well spent if it achieves greater understanding and creates better relationships with Aboriginal people.

3. Archaeology is not largely concerned with the measuring of bones as is commonly believed, but is a discipline that can be used extensively by Aboriginal people to extract information that may benefit their communities. Aborigines can use such information to firmly establish their long history in this place now called Australia.

4. Archaeologists have rediscovered a lot of valuable information about the past way of life of Aboriginal people which otherwise may not have been available to them. This information is very important to present-day Aboriginal people because it proves that they have indeed been here for tens of thousands of years prior to any gubba sticking a flag into an inch of ground. That their claims to 'the land our mother' have a concrete backing (understandable to non-Aborigines) is shown by cultural continuity between past and present.

5. In the past much of this information was not readily available to Aborigines because of the form in which it was produced and today this can still be said though there have been some efforts by 'informed' researchers. However, until the information gathered is translated into the 'grass-roots' language of the people and this information returned to them, there will always be a mistrust of researchers.
6. There is an increasing need for Aboriginal people to be trained in the field of archaeology and other related fields. As more Aboriginal people gain experience and knowledge in this field, and their communities are directly involved in the researching and producing of their own research documents, only then can we be assured that this information will get back to the people.

7. The relevance of future research must be decided upon by both researchers and the relevant Aboriginal communities or Aboriginal organisations. This direct consultation with Aboriginal groups will ensure that the work is done for the benefit of the Aboriginal community and not the sole benefit of the researcher.

8. Researchers must be accountable to the communities they work with or wish to study. This involves getting feedback from the communities before finalising the document so that fundamental inaccuracies are dealt with, and the community can see whether or not the researcher is in fact complying with their wishes.

When researchers give greater consideration to the above points and Aboriginal people ensure that they are directly consulted, only then can mutual benefits be gained.

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