



A First Meeting with a First Woman

25 February 2021

Report by Honey Nelson and Diyan Coe

Present: Diyan Coe, Aboriginal Tent Embassy
Honey Nelson, Janet Salisbury, Kirsten Anker, Women's Climate Congress

On 25 Feb three of us from the Congress met with Ms. Diyan Coe, Wiradjuri woman and resident caretaker of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra.

This is the 50th year since four Aboriginal men arrived from Sydney on Jan. 26, 1972, in the pouring rain, sat down opposite the parliament house under an old beach umbrella, and vowed not to leave until there was recognition and justice for Indigenous history since colonists' invasion.

First Peoples' knowledge of Women and Men

This first meeting was more a teaching than a conversation. A first and fundamental recognition is the *One-ness of everything*: all things are connected, every moment and place and event has a purpose.

We learned something about the First Peoples' ancestral way of *societal and spiritual balance*: in the equal significance of women and men, of their shared and also their separate practical and sacred responsibilities, the deep and necessary differences in their tasks and the ways they think.

Women and men have both Female and Male within; we can know and understand much about each other, when we look. We also share and can balance knowledge of the polarities of good and bad, compassion and egocentricity, interior and exterior, modesty and vanity, equity and hierarchy.

Women have a strong *interior* awareness of heart as well as mind and soul. We endure pain and deprivation better than men. Women may want to be loved; but men *need* to be loved.

Women do not need to compete with men; we have our own equally powerful identity and nature. In First Peoples' cultural, family and ceremonial lives, women occupy realms of their own knowledge and learning, 'women's business' – just as men do.

All people are the same; no one is any more important than any other. No *species* (including human) is any more important than any other. We are all born of the sacred, sentient Mother Earth, who offers not 'land ownership' but our entire living to us. She loves and cares for us all equally; and our own welcome duties, as her

clever children, are to love and care for her purposefully in return, and for all the Life born of her. And as Women we have, by ancestral maternal nature, the moral guardianship of the next generations of Life.

The Laws of good living come from the Earth: good laws, dedicated to sustenance of Life and diversity: like commandments, worthy to be obeyed. The colonial settler laws and hierarchical social structures have been made by men throughout recent millennia, and are fundamentally brittle – easily cheated, abused, bent or broken. Modern ‘laws’ give priority to money and profit, alienated from the deep love and life of the Earth, her festive seasonal cycles, and the special needs of a dry and ancient antipodean continent once intricately managed by First Peoples.

This land was colonised by harsh overseers and abused convict people, a trauma for all of us that has never been addressed or healed through the generations.

First Peoples are all traumatised, wounded, unhealed. They have been deprived of their necessary, beloved duty to care for country and waters. Their society has broken down.

Women too are traumatised by their long history of oppression. We need each other now. And we are resilient. We have big work to carry out our primary women’s responsibilities to the next generations, and repair the injuries of our history.