

Dear Minister

Appointment of Committee to Review Model Australian History Curriculum

I write to broadly support the appointment of Prof Blainey's committee, but also to express some specific concerns, particularly concerning process, and the membership of the committee.

Late on the day that the appointment of the committee was announced, I was assured by your office that the committee was simply a review mechanism to evaluate Prof Tony Taylor's model Australian History curriculum.

HTAA finds it particularly strange that there is no teacher representative on the committee, particularly in the context of the subsequent banning of Ms Jennifer Lawless from participation by the NSW Minister for Education.

Without a teacher representative, the HTAA believes that any recommendations presented by the committee may lack insight into what really happens in school history classrooms. There is also a risk that the recommendations will lack credibility among history teachers and the broader educational community. Any lack of credibility would hinder the progression of the outcomes of the Australian History Summit, and would be extremely regrettable.

While I recognise that the membership of the review committee had to be restrained to a manageable number, HTAA believes that there are a number of significant voices or perspectives missing from the panel. Most obviously, the committee now lacks a female or females, and there is no Indigenous representative on the panel. While HTAA stands ready to contribute to the review, and consequent improvements to Prof Taylor's model, we believe that these voices need to be heard. The committee is also heavy with representatives from the south-east corner of the nation. It would be possible to interpret this as an endorsement of a NSW-style model for the curriculum. While NSW does have a working model, there are flaws in it.

Also regrettable is the lack of information or consultation surrounding the appointment of the committee. As a key stakeholder group, we are disappointed that HTAA was not informed, let alone consulted, in the appointment of this group. I believe that the Association has played a positive and key role in advancing the Summit process and outcomes. To be excluded in this manner was not helpful.

I am also concerned at what seems (perhaps to an inexperienced observer) the relative slowness of the advancement of the outcomes of the Summit process. Even if Prof Blainey's committee reports its findings within the current month, we are now getting close to a pre-election caretaker period. It is hard to envision a situation, given the propinquity of the election, where the finalisation of the curriculum can be achieved before approximately March 2008.

If this is the case, the Commonwealth will be faced with the almost impossible task of having (at best) nine months to oversee the preparations for implementation in the 2009 school year. Most worryingly, this scenario would allow insufficient time for trialling the curriculum, and evidence-based modification of it. There would also be insufficient time for the development of well-targeted materials and professional learning to support teachers who will have to implement the curriculum.

I still believe that the outcomes of the Australian History Summit are most worthwhile. The HTAA is committed to help achieving them, but there are significant issues to be addressed.

Please let HTAA know if there is anything that we can positively contribute to the advancement of the renewal of history in our schools.

With best wishes

Nick Ewbank

9 July 2007