



HISTORY TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

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OPEN LETTER TO HON MS JULIE BISHOP AND HON MR STEPHEN SMITH, REGARDING AUSTRALIAN HISTORY CURRICULUM

The History Teachers' Association of Australia (HTAA) has become increasingly concerned about what is happening with regard to a proposed national curriculum for Australian History. It is now more than twelve months since discussions began with a national History Summit in August 2006. In the meantime, HTAA and its state affiliates feel that we have been sidelined from the process. There has been very little communication, there is no indication of a timeline and there is uncertainty about the status and role of the 'Reference Group' that was formed recently.

HTAA believes that history teachers are broadly supportive of the idea of a national Australian history curriculum. However, if the goal is to produce a national syllabus that is acceptable and workable across all states, it would seem obvious that classroom teachers need to be part of the process that produces such a syllabus. Such involvement would need to happen well before the agenda is narrowed.

A significant difficulty for HTAA and its state affiliates is that, while we are anxious to be part of the process, we have been given no clear understanding of the political parameters and have no control over the timeline. As a result, too often we find ourselves needing to react quickly in circumstances where we have not had time to consult with our members or formulate a considered response. At the moment, for example, we are three weeks out from our Annual General Meeting and National Conference. More than twelve months after the national curriculum process was begun, we essentially have nothing to discuss. Moreover, in response to conference delegates' questions, we have to report that we are not sure what is going on.

This situation is unsatisfactory. We would like to be better informed for our Annual General Meeting and National Conference. More importantly, with a federal election imminent we feel that the major parties need to clarify their policies with regard to a national history curriculum. With this in mind, we would like to offer you the opportunity of responding to the following questions. Ideally, we would like a response before our Annual General Meeting on 1 October 2007. HTAA's intention is to give the questions and responses wide circulation, initially through the websites and publications of its state affiliates.

1. What is your understanding of the current process for developing a national Australian history curriculum and how committed are you to this process?

2. Could you outline a rationale and vision for a national Australian history curriculum?
3. What is your attitude towards consultation with state and territory education authorities? Can you outline how this would be achieved?
4. How important do you feel it is to involve history teachers in the process of developing a national Australian history curriculum? Could you outline how this would be achieved?
5. The Executive members of HTAA and its state affiliates are busy working teachers who represent busy working teachers. With this in mind, how would you propose to make it easier for them to participate in consultation and syllabus development?
6. How important do you feel it is to take into account the differing perspectives of states and territories, with regard to both history and curriculum? Could you outline how this would be achieved?
7. Could you propose a timeline for the development of a national Australian History curriculum?

Yours faithfully

Nick Ewbank
President

12 September 2007