



Melbourne, 11 November

Kooris and the Media Conference

The Conference organised by the South Eastern Indigenous Media Association Inc. brought together representatives of the Victorian Koori community and the mainstream media, to discuss the portrayal of Kooris in the media and ways in which relationships between the media and Aboriginal people can be established, maintained and improved.

Alf Bamblett, ATSIC Commissioner, opened the conference by saying that Aboriginal people are still fringe dwellers in relation to the mainstream media. They need their own distinct place in the media in order to offset the all too familiar bad news stories and sensationalist reports relating to Aboriginal people.

Michael Gawenda, representing *The Age*, said that in the past attitudes towards Aboriginal issues in the media had been marginal or non-existent. The widespread view was that these issues did not sell newspapers, because it was perceived that the public was not interested. While many journalists have been sympathetic towards Aboriginal people, their lack of historical, social, and political knowledge about Aboriginal culture has meant that coverage has been inaccurate and inadequate. This mixture of goodwill and ignorance has left the media in a poor position to cover Aboriginal issues. Michael Gawenda mentioned that media organisations, including the *Age* had largely failed to appoint specialists on Aboriginal issues. Interestingly, in a later session Rosemary West, also of *The Age*, identified herself as just that, though she had to juggle this responsibility with two other rounds.

sage to the media was, 'Don't be sympathetic, be responsible'.

Lisa Bellea, Koori Liaison Officer at Melbourne University believed that members of the mainstream media needed to do work experience on Aboriginal community radio programs in order to better understand Aboriginal people and their culture.

During a workshop at the conference entitled 'Talking each other's lingo - the problem from both sides', Alec Jackomos from the Aboriginal Advancement League made the point that the term Koori was actually a Wiradjuri word from NSW and had never traditionally been used to describe Aboriginal people in Victoria and Tasmania. While it is now widely used and accepted in Victoria and Tasmania, many older Aboriginal people in these States do not use it to describe themselves, and object to its use in relation to them.

The need for the media to start to listen to Aboriginal people and begin to recognise their ignorance of Aboriginal culture, was the most prominent theme to emerge from the conference. The next step is for the mainstream media to begin to develop educational programs to redress this ignorance. □

Bruce Shearer

Journalists' Ignorance

The perception of journalists as expressing goodwill towards, but ignorance of Aboriginal people was reiterated by Stan Grant, the host of *Real Life*. Unacceptable terms were still being used by newsroom staff to describe Aboriginal people. More Aboriginal people needed to be introduced into the mainstream media in order to correct ignorance both inside and outside the media.

David Broadbent, Director of News at HSV 7 agreed that journalists are still not specialising in Aboriginal issues and were largely ignorant of them. While commercial television needed all the positive images it could get, particularly in relation to Aboriginal people, it was primarily ratings driven and stories needed to be newsworthy in their own right.

Tony Birch, a post-graduate history student from Melbourne University, argued that a strong and independent Koori media was required in Victoria. He said that Kooris need to be in a position to refute negative views such as those expressed by Professor Geoffrey Blainey. His mes-

