

**TETER MAUKI MAUKI  
MABO LECTURE**

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I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land where we meet, and thank them for their hospitality and kindness during our time here at this the Native Title Conference. I pay respect to you, our Elders and our ancestors. I pay my respects to Eddie Koiki Mabo's family and I acknowledge the plaintiffs in the Mabo Case and their families and all people whose Ged b'long Mer. I would like to thank James William for his introduction and wish to acknowledge all of you in the audience for being here, for discussing issues of great concern and for allowing me the privilege of addressing you here today.

The ideas I want to express in this lecture are intended not to necessarily be provocative but are a heartfelt offering.

First, I will share the four instructions that are the foundation of my life.

These instructions I have learned from Eddie Mabo, other Meriam and the great many warriors with whom my life has been lived. And having been so fortunate to live my life with the people who have taught me so many invaluable lessons I am obliged to give back, to take responsibility and to create a path that is my own.

During the second part of the lecture I will share with you how I have tried to do just that, by trying to extend our magnificent Indigenous science tradition with Earth system sciences, and environmental and quantum science traditions.

I have only about 30 minutes to do this so if you could please appreciate that this is an abbreviated version of a body of work that will probably interest me for the rest of my life. Even as I set out this new way of viewing the world, I concede that it is beyond me to provide in this lecture the strategies needed to get there, or how this new agenda is to be enacted. Making an offering is after all only one part of a conversation, people need to be able to accept. Acceptance happens after an act of listening and I am asking you to please listen with an open relaxed mind. Today, I speak to your imagination; it is your inner self that I wish to talk to. We are all heart men and women; we are brave and strong and true.

We know suffering, we know longing, and we know how to fight; but mostly we know how to love – our country, our families, our cause, and because of this, it is to the heart of Eddie Mabo and all the plaintiffs in the case, and their families, supporters and friends that I dedicate this lecture.

There are some men credited across Australia as having given the gift of sight to many Australian and other people whose sight has been lost or reduced to a point where they no longer trust what it is they see. Men like Professor Hugh Taylor and Professor Fred Hollows immediately spring to mind. Men of incredible talent and skill, and men whose names will live on through the foundations and research institutes that carry their names into the future.

However, sometimes to gain sight and improve your quality of life, you need more than eyes to see, you need vision. There are visionaries who reside among us, visionaries like the man after whom this lecture is named, who have helped the entire nation gain sight through vision, who helped Australians see us as we really are: over 200 nations of peoples with a continuing culture, connections to country

and knowledge traditions that are increasingly invaluable for the survival of this nation, and indeed humanity across the entire world.

Visionaries of exception have an additional quality, in my view: that of patience. They accept that visions are rarely realised in short periods of time. Men like Eddie Koiki Mabo and Vincent Lingiari, for example, understood that time exists outside of our day to day concerns.

They understood that time is not about when to pick the kids up from school, or to get to the airport, or scheduling of meetings or about what you can and cannot fit into a 24-hour day. They understood time to exist beyond our human sense making. Time is not a human concern; time is indifferent to humans. Time witnessed the birth of the Universe and is present in all the elements of Earth and forms the cradle for all that is, and all that will be.

Visionaries who know this concept of time as truth are capable of great patience born within that truth. Visionaries like Eddie Mabo, the plaintiffs in the case, visionaries like Vincent Lingari, and like many of you here in this room continually demonstrate a patience beyond normal human endurance.

These visionaries, girded by the strength of their vision and their conviction in truth and justice, delivered for us all outcomes that changed how Australians see and understand this land for the rest of all time.

Whilst these visionaries too are men and women of incredible talent and skill I suspect, there will be few who refer to them as those who restored sight to Australia. Through deep love of country, the steadfastness of philosophic traditions and the abiding love of their families and friends; visionaries like Eddie Koiki Mabo were tasked to lift the veil of ignorance, to give Australians the capacity to see us as nations with our own territories, songlines, culture, tradition of governance with responsibilities and obligations to our lands and seas and an unbroken connection and an unceasing custodial responsibility to country. And so, the first instruction

given to me by the example set by these visionaries: Have patience beyond normal human endurance to give people the great gift of sight through vision.

My second instruction came from the heartfelt tears of a beautiful, strong, gentle man with a warrior heart. The late Ate James Rice was invited to be interviewed by AIATSIS staff who visited Mer 16 years after the 1992 Mabo judgement. He cordially agreed and instructed us to come and interview both himself and his wife on the veranda of their home at 3pm. Sharp! At age 82, he explained that this was the first time someone had come back and asked him about the case. A video camera was set up and he was asked questions to prompt his recollection of what had happened during that time. He told us of being in the courtroom answering questions straight, he spoke of his love for his wife and family, and his island home. And, in return for his words, he heard that the person interviewing him had completed a law degree, had read the transcripts of the trial and that she was so proud to meet him. She told him that those transcripts were available to scholars around the world, that his words and the actions of Meriam people had made a world-wide impact.

And when the heart has its moment of truth the soul cannot be stilled. I can barely see the see the video by this point, it is blurry because I am crying too much. But I can make out him wiping the tears spilling over his eyes and hear him say words that I will carry with me for the rest of my days: *"I did not do what I did for the Rice family, or for Torres Strait Islanders, I did this for the whole world."* And so it is.

This video is made more potent by virtue of the fact that this great Elder died in his sleep three weeks after this interview. Time may have been indifferent to him, but we were not. The Mabo decision is replicated in law and changed the lives of people all around the world. Thus my second instruction: Do what you do in ways that are both local and global; do what you do so that it makes a difference for you, and for others around the world.

The third instruction, which underpins my life, is now entwined in my own personal, cultural and professional ethic and is premised on 'equality in diversity'. This ethic is

deeply founded in the need to maintain and keep balance — it is a principal ethic of equilibrium. This ethic, founded from the philosophic tradition of keeping balance between all the realms, does not allow me to separate, diminish or isolate any knowledge (and consequently any identity) in relation to my own. I am not bigger, nor smaller than anyone else in this room. Who we are and what we know are equal to each other. The knowledges we have, the life experience we have, although diverse, does not make anyone less or more, right or wrong. We are who we are, we see, think and act in the way we act, and because of this, we are equal. I believe that approaching any task from within one specific knowledge system would replicate and superimpose the roles and forms of power that we often find ourselves fighting against so hard. Ours is a worldview that is able to see and appreciate diversity. Ours is a responsibility to seek and sustain balance. To live this third instruction is to treat everything as equal, to welcome diversity and to provide spaces for diversities of views.

The fourth instruction is perhaps the most powerful and is directly related to the Mabo case. Teter Muki Muki, the principle of only walking in your father's footsteps, of following a path and of non trespass. Land is appropriated through the Meriam law of Malo, the appropriation does not constitute a relationship of dominance or a property relation; rather it is born out of sacredness for the soil – you take what you need, you don't exploit land, you do not grasp at it, you do not wander from your path, Tag Muki Muki – you keep your hands to yourself, Teter Muki Muki – you cannot trespass on another person's land.

Malo's Law of non-trespass is what won the Mabo Case. The genius of Meriam people was for Eddie Koiki Mabo, not to try to state his right to land on Mer, but to try to claim the property of the person next to him. Because of the principle of non-trespass, the whole community became engaged through Malo's Law to explain the connection to country. Malo's law was what was recognised in the High Court and changed Australia forever; Malo's Law has changed the world forever. Malo's Law recognises the rights of both the human and the natural world as have legal status; this is a concept so radical that it cannot be considered in Western society's

jurisprudence frameworks. My fourth instruction is simply this: Our philosophic traditions have and will transform the world. We are not to deviate from them or compromise them in anyway.

Now what to do when you have responsibility for enacting these four instructions in your everyday life? You go hard, my people. Eddie Koiki Mabo was one of Australia's *outstanding* citizens because he pushed the bounds of what that might mean to be an Australian. I intend to be a citizen of his calibre. I might never reach it, but my intention is set and pure.

Eddie Koiki Mabo provided a unique opportunity for reconciliation in this country; not by reconciling black and white Australia, but by reconciling all Australians to our way of knowing, belonging, and living in the natural systems that are country. And in this second part of the lecture, I want to tell you how I found my own way to do this; to reconcile all Australians with this beautiful, spectacular and divine country. I am using human ecology, a field of ostensibly western science through which our own scientific traditions can be brought into mainstream academia and made relevant to students and practitioners of science today.

I have only been able to come to this place, and make my contribution, because I remain true to those four instructions, which state unequivocally: you have to find your path and live it. You have to find your own questions and your own answers and you have to establish reciprocal relationships when you can. After all, we are touched by what we touch. We are shaped by what we shape. We are enhanced by what we enhance.

At the commencement of the 21st century, I am mindful of the fact that we are looking to secure our First Peoples' economic, environmental, social and cultural futures in an unprecedented period of change in the world. We are losing biodiversity and have damaged our land and waterways. A great number of species are facing extinction. The holders of the oldest ecological knowledge in the world are being forced to participate in education, political and modern systems that have

little regard for that knowledge, and almost always no regard for their country.

To remedy this, we need to build a long term and inclusive view and then purposefully craft a new story around that view and use that story to build new ways of living, new ways of being, and new ways of having relationships. It is an extension of the First People's political agenda we have in Australia, a view 'beyond' where we are now. The realization of this story, and our collective commitment to achieving the aspirations inherent in this story, is the vision is what people like Eddie Koiki Mabo gave his life to.

To scan our knowledge horizons and create an agenda based on that scan is only possible because of our efforts to date. It is our thinking and imagination that makes such agenda development possible. Native Title was an idea, a concept a few years ago. And we have nurtured it along to what it is today. Ideas are at the heart of this realisation. But now, I believe, we need to think about what Native Title will be 50 years into the future.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have asserted that we are not separate to country, that we are imbued with it, we have responsibilities for it even when we are not born on country, it is our homeland, our heart land; filled with songlines; alive for us in ways that are often beyond the comprehension of people who are not profoundly connected, or from country.

Whilst 'normal' reconciliation activities aim to displace the privilege of mainstream Australia through democratic means, it is difficult for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to engage fully in the language for and about Native Title because it is difficult to be reactive or to be conciliatory to the 'colonial project' in this country. We are ONLY to want what everyone else wants – to take up our rightful place in a mainstream middle class and enjoy all the benefits and resources that Australia and a credit card can offer us.

What is problematic about positioning First Peoples in this lineal trajectory toward

our place in middle class Australia is how we are 'viewed', and how we have adopted that 'view' of ourselves in relation to everything else. Understanding this view led to me ask questions in an effort to re-frame where we are at, and where we might go to with our affairs in the future. Those questions were:

- What would happen if we removed indigenous and non-indigenous categories, what would we be?
- Why are we so heavily invested in these descriptors?
- What would happen if we took the view that the sickness that permeates our Indigenous society is a symptom of the way life is lived in modern Australian society?
- What is the relationship between these two things, modern wealth and Indigenous disadvantage?
- What would happen if the disconnect between modern Australian society and the ecosystems in which they have arisen is so profound; that the country is so raped, pillaged and plundered that, because of our sensitivity to country, we have no choice but to be sick?
- What is it that the rest of Australia has to give up in order to gain a relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?
- What is it we have to give up? And what is there to gain?
- What do we have to be open to in order to change?

These re-framing questions and their answers move the experience of Native Title out of the colonial project into new spaces and new opportunities. This is the space that can lend itself to post-Native Title discussions; holding onto parts of our Native Title story that are instructive, but opening up to new conversations; creating new ideas and new realities.

I cannot state what a vision for a Native Title agenda 50 years into the future should be; but, if I were to take into account our philosophies and sciences and joined them to Earth system sciences and ecology, I could suggest that a future vision might be that the world, in all its magnificence, simply remains here for future generations.



Eddie Koike Mabo did just this; he had a vision that Mer would be there for all its descendents. In 50 years time, Native Title practitioners could form part of the global infrastructure that facilitates a transition from a period of human devastation to a period of time when all humans are present to the planet in a mutually beneficial manner.

This is the natural trajectory for Native Title, a fluid movement between reconciling people, to reconciling people and the planet.

Such a process of reconciling people with the planet has no historical parallel. Past humans, our shared ancestors, did not deal with anything comparable to the toxins in the air, the water, the soil, or with the immense volume of chemicals dispersed throughout the planet. Nor did they deal with the extinction of species or the altering of climate on a scale such as what we confront today.

In order to ensure the planet is available for future generations we have to reconcile our older knowledge traditions with our modern ones and reconcile our views about, then act on how to live within the very structure and functioning of the planet itself.

This transition will not be easy or painless, however there is precedent in thinking how to achieve this. In 1962, Rachel Carson published the book *Silent Spring*, which played a large role in articulating ecology as a subversive subject — as a perspective that cut against the grain of materialism, scientism and the technologically engineered control of nature.

The book argued that uncontrolled pesticide use was killing not only animals and birds, but also humans. Its title was meant to evoke a spring season in which no bird songs could be heard, because they had all vanished as a result of pesticide abuse. She made it clear she was not advocating the banning or complete withdrawal of helpful pesticides, but was instead encouraging responsible and carefully managed use, with an awareness of the chemicals' impact on an entire ecosystem.

In 2010, another Silent Spring has evoked my imagination, my people. The *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill, which spewed oil for three months into the Gulf of Mexico is the largest accidental marine oil spill in the history of the petroleum industry. The spill stemmed from a sea-floor oil gusher that killed 11 platform workers and injuring 17 others. The leak was finally stopped by capping the gushing wellhead, but not before it had released about 4.9 million barrels, or 185 million gallons of crude oil into our ocean on 15 July 2010. This silent spring event caused extensive damage to marine and wildlife habitats as well as the Gulf's fishing and tourism industries.

Every attempt was made to protect hundreds of miles of beaches, wetlands and estuaries from the spreading oil. Scientists have also reported immense underwater plumes of dissolved oil not visible at the surface. The U.S. Government has named BP as the responsible party, and officials have committed to holding the company accountable for all cleanup costs and other damage. After its own internal probe, BP admitted that it made mistakes that led to the Gulf of Mexico oil spill. This oil spill, this deepwater horizon silent spring, exists because of our current human reliance on petroleum.

To bring this disaster close to our own home its important to note that BP has currently lodged applications to explore for oil in the Otway basin, just scores of kilometres from we are meeting today.

In the modern world most of us go through our lives concerned with the day to day issues of making a living and hanging onto our particular lifestyle. I have this image in my mind about that particular oil spill, I can remember how much the basis of this particular lifestyle was spilled into our oceans, and hope that it might herald a new era of being cognizant to the planet. One in which we take account of what we are doing, where we'll listen a little bit more closely, look a little bit more deeply and can find, often with little effort, extraordinary reasons to change our way of seeing and understanding the world.

And each of you in this room at the forefront of this new and needed local and global movement that will lead to lasting change... we might consider for example undertaking a change in how we use petroleum or coal and our view of our place in the world:

- From “We need electricity to be comfortable and maintain our way of life” to “producing electricity is pumping billions of tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, leading to global warming and extremely destructive weather patterns.”
- From “Being able to drive where and when we want at cheap cost is freedom!” to “Our driving habits are feeding the destruction of the planet.”
- From “All of nature is here to serve mankind” to “Humans are no more or less important to the planet than any other life form.”

The ideas encapsulated in the future agenda for Native Title make possible the new stories needed for our time — the stories of our cultures, our paradigms, our beliefs — that form the core of what we tell ourselves is ‘reality’, both now and in the future. Stories, in this context, are anything we add to our original experience that alters what we think is going on, or changes how we think about things.

Change we must, and change we can. In fact every time a culture has been transformed from what it was before — for better or worse — it has been because of an idea, an insight, a new understanding of how things are, and what is possible. Ideas precede every revolution, every war, every transformation and every invention. Eddie Koiki Mabo’s simple idea that the Queensland government didn’t “own” his and his people’s Mer Island led to the most fundamental shift in the relationship between colonizer and colonized in Australian history.

The simple idea for these times is that humans will have to choose to live in a mutually enhancing relationship with the larger community of life systems and take responsibility for the functioning of these systems.

A great deal of the evidence from a range of sciences states that social and economic goals must be achieved within the capacity of the bio sphere of the Earth and that we must challenge the key normative questions facing our modern consumer societies.

And we can do this, because Indigenous peoples have scientific and philosophic traditions that build upon common spiritual rituals, social organisation and ceremonial observances that can celebrate that the foundations of the world are unified; unification derived from the experience that all of creation is interrelated. Our new story is premised on the fact that we exist in an interconnected life system. Indigenous philosophies show that it is possible to learn to be in the world in reciprocal relationships with all things, through cooperation and constraint, interdependent thinking, morality and action. Scientific evidence indicates that our planet is a one-time endowment, profoundly inter related with the constant energy source provided by the sun and now more than at any other time in history, humans need to understand and respond effectively to our own human role within this new information.

When I started to speak to you earlier, I asked you to open your minds and let me speak to your imaginations.

I now ask you to consider new stories, new truths, new discourses new ways of being in the world. For me, and all the journeying I have done, because of scientific evidence from Indigenous peoples here in Australia and around the world and from deep within the philosophies and truths of Earth system sciences, quantum physicists and environmentalists I have this new knowing as my truth:

**There is no difference between Indigenous peoples and non- Indigenous peoples. We all belong to the human species. There is no difference between the knowledge of Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous peoples. It is all human knowledge. There is no physiological difference in our brains in how they function. We generate human knowledge. There is evidence to demonstrate conclusively**

**that there is no separation between us as people, and there is no separation within the natural systems in which we live. We are already, at a bio-physical level, reconciled.**

What is different is the energy context that gives rise to that knowledge. Modern Australia's knowledge is founded in fossil fuel. Indigenous peoples' knowledge is founded in sunlight. The stability of sunlight as an energy source has seen the capacity of Indigenous people to hand down knowledge of how to live in country generation after generation. Petroleum as an energy source makes us oblivious to our natural environment. We are at a point where we can transition from this petroleum based energy context and it is a moment of significance far beyond what any of us can imagine.

Understanding ourselves as deeply and profoundly connected means that there is no one race that can lay claim to indigenous wisdom; It lives deep in the heart of every living creature... anyone who remains deeply aware of the rhythms of the natural world can remember it. I can say this because the languages and beliefs of our collective ancestors were not embedded in colonial thinking and were not used to construct privilege. We are already reconciled, not only between each other, but with every other being with which we live our lives. And as such, we all have custodial responsibilities, we have to reify the eco systems in which we live, make subordinate our human individual requirements and practice personal development by responding to the needs of our whole community – including those in other species. This is task of the post Native Title agenda.

What we have to reconcile then are a set of complexities and tensions that are becoming the primary tension in human affairs. We have to reconcile developers and ecologists on the state of our natural world. The economic tensions between empires and colonies which characterised a previous era is now shifting to the economic tensions between village peoples of the world — with their organic way of life — and transnational corporations with their industrialized agriculture. The Murray River fiasco should never have happened. What we have to reconcile no

longer belongs in divisions based on political party or social class or ethnic group. What needs to be healed is a division based on the human as one of the components within the larger community of the planet Earth. We cannot mediate the present situation as though there were some minimal balance already existing that could be slightly modified — the violence already done is on a scale beyond acceptability. And again, Indigenous peoples in Australia are most vulnerable to the effects of these tensions, as is the land over which we care.

To make this new way of viewing the world a reality, we need new tools for new problems. One such tool is also found in the sciences — post normal science is a method focusing on aspects of problem solving that tend to be neglected in traditional scientific and indeed in policy development: uncertainty, value loading, and plural legitimate perspectives. Post normal science includes these uncertainties in the framing of complex issues and provides an opportunity for extending more and different people's participation in decision-making. The shift to post-normal science or other methods for dealing with uncertainty and complexity is imperative.

To adopt such a method is a critical change in this country because it allows the emergence of new strategies in which the role of Indigenous science and new sciences are appreciated in their full context. We need these methods to infiltrate not only our economic system, but governance, jurisprudence, the medical profession, religion and education. We must adapt and adopt new ways of living. We never thought of ourselves as capable of doing harm to the very structure of the planet or extinguishing the living forms that give the world its grandeur. So much now depends on our decisions about our way into the future. So, what's it going to be my people? Shall we continue to fight or shall we envision for ourselves new futures that are deeply founded in our philosophic traditions? The answer lies deep within each and every person in this room. Just as each star has its own trajectory across the sky, so do you have a path to follow.

So to bring this to a close, I have offered my ideas to both provoke and stimulate. I have taken a cue from those visionaries who reside among us and given all

Australians the great gift of sight and the set of instructions they have given me and upon which I have built my life.

I have asked you to think about the next 50 years in Native Title and what that might mean for our people; not to denigrate what has been achieved to date in your practice, or to say that our work in this realm is finished. It is not. But beyond these actions, there is an expanded Native Title agenda because we all have a role and a responsibility to protect the health of ecosystems and all who reside in them. I have spoken about the synergies between Indigenous peoples' science and the science of earth system scientists, environmentalists and ecologists and the need to build a reconciliation agenda not between people, but between people and living systems in the way Eddie Mabo did.

He and others have always understood, and not deviated from an understanding that it is these local and global interdependent systems that give us life, that give us reverence, gives us a story in which we can all celebrate nature and the deep mystery of things in a meaningful way. We have a chance to embrace the opportunity presented here, to change the soul of the modern world, not just technologically, not just to get higher wages, or to even get physically improved conditions for Indigenous peoples but to change our inner world, to have a vision of a world transformed through stories that we created to positively impact on each other and the planet, for all of our sakes.

It has been my greatest pleasure to provide for you a lecture named after Koiki, in the presence of his family and in your presence too. We have thrown the soil to the four winds, sucked the fresh clean water into our mouths and blown it out, our offering to the four directions. The conch shell sounds and the drums are beating. Our companies are ready and strong. Our Elders are in the front row. This is how it should be. Strike the ground hard all our people, in whichever way you are gifted to do. Lift your voices, your heads and your hearts to the sky. Know that whatever you do, you do it for all of us, and that we are with you always, in all ways, without your having to ask for it. Thank you for listening.