

# **SUBMISSION TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM, ASSESSMENT, AND REPORTING AUTHORITY FROM THE PNG ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The PNG Association of Australia (PNGAA) is a dynamic association for people with interests in contemporary and historical events in Papua New Guinea, supporting friendly and positive relationships between the people of PNG and Australia, and the preservation of historical material related to Papua New Guinea.

Since its establishment in 1951, the Association's role has included activities such as supporting projects in PNG, working to strengthen the Australia-PNG relationship, and preserving historical materials related to PNG, as well as facilitating communication and interaction between members.

Its membership comprises a global network of more than 1600 people.

## **2. THE DRAFT CURRICULUM – GENERAL COMMENTS**

The PNGAA welcomes the proposed introduction of a national school curriculum in Australia, and in particular the planned curriculum for the teaching of history in Australian schools.

We support the proposals to incorporate a blend of historical approaches into the curriculum and welcome the attention being given to the development of skills, especially those concerned with cross-cultural understanding and Australia's engagement with the Asia-Pacific region.

We regard this as a wonderful opportunity to redress the unfortunate situation that has arisen in this country where knowledge and understanding of our region has lapsed significantly. Such understanding is more important than ever, for Australia's commercial and trade relationships, its place as a major regional power and, a concern that connects all countries and their citizens, climate change and its impact on our environment.

## **3. THE DRAFT CURRICULUM – SPECIFIC CONCERNS**

However, we are concerned that the proposed national history curriculum does not address what we believe is a matter of vital importance in the understanding of contemporary Australia through its history. This matter is the long relationship that Australians have had with our closest neighbour, Papua New Guinea.

We believe that this is an important matter for Australians to understand for a number of reasons. These include:

- the role of Australians as missionaries, traders, and planters during the nineteenth century
- the labour trade (sometimes known as 'blackbirding') that resulted in many people from what is now PNG living and working in Australia

- Papua's, and later New Guinea's, role as external territories of Australia
- the many thousands of Australian men and women who worked and lived in PNG as a part of this relationship
- the fighting that took place in many parts of PNG during World War II
- the work of many Australians who contributed to the economic, social and political development of PNG, including its independence in 1975
- the continuing close relationship between the two countries since independence
- the impact on contemporary Australia of development in PNG through its great mineral and other resources, and the future impact of its possible disintegration through neglect, corruption, and poor governance.

We note that the current draft national history curriculum does not address any of these concerns and we strongly believe that it is in Australia's national interest that Australian school children learn about them.

#### **4. SPECIFIC PROPOSALS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

We note that in the draft curriculum there are three levels where students will learn about Australia and the Asia-Pacific region. These are at years six, nine, and ten. We also note that material for inclusion in the years eleven and twelve curriculum is yet to be published, so our comments and recommendations are limited to the earlier years at this stage.

##### 4.1 YEAR SIX

At Year Six, we see that the curriculum addresses the issues of Australia and its relationships with the British Empire and Asia (Knowledge and Understanding Goal 1). We also acknowledge that it addresses Australia's links with the Asia-Pacific region (Goal 2).

We recommend that this presents an opportunity to introduce students to the history of Australia's engagement with Papua New Guinea, incorporating the varying approaches taken by missionaries, traders, and administration officials (including, but not limited to, patrol officers). We also recommend that the Australian role in the Pacific War that took place on PNG territory should be introduced at this level.

##### 4.2 YEAR NINE

At Year Nine, we see that the curriculum includes understanding of the making of the modern world. We also note that it includes an appreciation of the impact of European influence in the Asia-Pacific region, and provides one example of this as Fiji.

We recommend that Australia's role in the territorial administration of PNG, and its part in the country's successful independence exercise, should be included at this level. We strongly recommend that, instead of Fiji, PNG be specifically included as a subject of study.

#### 4.3 YEAR TEN

At Year Ten, we see that the curriculum includes an overview of Australia in the modern world, and a depth study entitled 'struggles for freedom and rights'.

We recommend that one aspect of Australia in the modern world should include an appreciation of Australia as the controlling power in Papua New Guinea until 1975 and Australia's ongoing relationship with PNG since independence. We also recommend that the narrative of how PNG acquired its independence should be included as a study with which Australian students should be familiar.

### **5. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

As noted earlier, the PNGAA welcomes the proposals to introduce a national school curriculum, and in particular the planned introduction of a national curriculum for history education.

We see that this represents a wonderful opportunity to improve the understanding of our children – who will soon be the decision-makers in this country – about not only our region but more specifically about the nation and its people with which we have had the longest shared history: Papua New Guinea.

We therefore request that our comments concerning what we see are the areas for improvement of the curriculum be taken into consideration when finalising the curriculum later this year. The PNGAA is a willing partner in helping to further shape the curriculum and provide resources for teaching and learning, and for this purpose it has appointed a sub-committee comprising

Mr Eric Johns, the Australian National University

Dr Jonathan Ritchie, Deakin University

Mr Deveni Temu, the Australian National University

We will be happy to continue to contribute to the work of shaping the curriculum for the teaching of history to young Australians.

Riley Warren AM

President

Papua New Guinea Association of Australia