

Langton's 'racist accusation' expunged from history

The transcript and audio of academic Marcia Langton's recent Boyer Lectures has been altered to remove her querying whether environmentalist Tim Flannery is "provocative and racist".

By Amber Jamieson

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Indigenous academic Marcia Langton's inflammatory comments suggesting Tim Flannery is a racist have been expunged from her Boyer Lectures, after lawyers deemed them potentially defamatory.

Flannery was unaware the passages had been removed from the speech and told *Crikey* he "would be interested to know if that constitutes an apology or not".

In her fourth Boyer Lecture on how mining has helped Aboriginal communities, which was broadcast on Radio National in December, Langton said:

"Did Flannery intend in this statement to be provocative and racist, asserting wrongly that mining would automatically occur in this area because of the transfer of title to Aboriginal people? Or, has he succumbed, unwittingly, to the environmental campaign ideology, that Australia's first people are the enemies of nature? I don't know which answer is the sadder. Such an intelligent man, and yet this is not the only instance of his misrepresentation of Aboriginal people in his published works.

"And then there are the so-called wilderness campaigners, who abuse the trust placed in them by a gullible public. While they treat us as the enemy, as brutish savages, fit only to have our property confiscated, they are not friends of Aboriginal people. While they persist with their deformed understanding of nature, they are not friends of the earth."

These paragraphs have now been removed from the ABC transcript and audio of the speech (although the first paragraph remains on the Fairfax extract online). The ABC confirms the excisions, with a spokesperson telling *Crikey*:

"For consistency, and in keeping with the final book and final CD to be published later this month, the transcript and audio have been edited. A note to this effect has been added to the online transcripts."

Crikey understands the changes came because HarperCollins, the publishers of Langton's upcoming book and audio recording of the Boyer Lectures, were concerned about the defamation possibilities after seeking out legal advice. Langton also wanted to make a few minor edits to the lectures before the book was published, so the ABC transcript and audio was edited to reflect those changes.

Flannery, a former Australian of the Year, says he's unfazed by Langton's comments — "I just thought it was self-evidently untrue" — and he hadn't asked for their removal, nor had any contact with Langton about them. So far Langton has not replied to *Crikey's* query on whether she stands by her comments.

But judging by her recent Twitter conversation with fellow academic Dominic Kelly, a PhD candidate and politics tutor at La Trobe University, Langton doesn't believe she accused Flannery of racism:



Crikey revealed last month Langton had omitted to disclose her funding from mining companies Rio Tinto and Woodside despite the theme of her five speeches being

“The Quiet Revolution: Indigenous People and the Resources Boom”. Flannery told *Crikey* Langton’s mining linkages concern him and he believes there should be a series of guidelines for disclosure on academic funding.

The prestigious Boyer Lectures are run annually by the ABC, with the book of the speeches due to be released on Thursday