
A tenacious voice for his people

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James Patrick "Jim" Hagan, AM Pioneering indigenous activist and Aboriginal welfare advocate Born: April 21, 1932, Bourke, New South Wales Died: April 5, 2016, Toowoomba

JIM Hagan was an extraordinary man whose audacity to challenge mainstream society's thinking that Aboriginal people should be out-of-sight and out-of-mind, living in camps on the fringes of rural towns, changed not only his life but that of his family and community.

His paternal grandmother, Trella, was born in the late 1870s on her Kullilli traditional lands, where Bulloo Downs homestead now stands in far southwest Queensland.

In her late teens, Trella met Irishman Joseph Hagan, who was working around Thargomindah. -Albert, Jim's -father, was born in 1895.

Although his parents worked in Quilpie, Jim was born in Bourke during one of their long trips south to keep their children away from white officials.

Leaving school at 14, Jim -became a stockman and worked on sheep and cattle stations.

He married Kooma woman Jean Mitchell and they raised five children - Pam, Stephen, Jimmo, Susan and Lawrence.

In 1964, with a couple of other Aborigines from the Cunnamulla "Yumba" camp, Jim began to take an interest in trying to improve conditions and opportunities for his people.

He became a founding member of the Cunnamulla Australian Native Welfare Association and also joined the local branch of the Labor Party.

At about the same time, Jim approached his trusted white friend and boss, Jack O'Shea, manager of Bulloo Downs, and confidently explained his radical plan of moving into the exclusive white township of Cunnamulla. Jack agreed and lent Jim Â£200 to buy a 1000m block in Bedford St. In 1966, Jim moved his family into a new home.

He repaid the loan then took a -labouring position with Paroo Shire Council and was soon promoted to ganger.

In 1974, Jim became founding chairman of the housing co-operative and, by 1976 he, along with other leaders, was successful in relocating most families from Yumba into town.

In 1975, he became a member of the Aboriginal Legal Service and later registered as a Justice of the Peace. In 1977, after moving to Toowoomba, Jim was elected to the newly formed -National Aboriginal Conference.

As NAC chairman in 1980, Jim made history when he -became the first indigenous -Australian to -address the United Nations, speaking on the Noonkanbah dispute involving a mining -exploration permit on -sacred land in Western Australia.

For his efforts in the national and international arena, Jim was made a Member of the Order of Australia in 1981.

On retiring from NAC, Jim took a job with the -Aboriginal Development Commission and was posted to Roma. He was then transferred to Brisbane and stayed with the commission through its transition to ATSIC until his retirement in 1997.

Jim now had time to follow his keen interest in lawn bowls and he later became the first -indigenous president of the Toowoomba West Bowls Club. He is survived by his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. His wife Jean predeceased him.