

# RECKONING

A DOCUMENTARY FILM PROJECT ABOUT TRUTH-TELLING

## SYNOPSIS

Following the rejection of an Indigenous Voice to Parliament, *Reckoning* responds to our First Nations' call in the Uluru Statement for truth-telling – by engaging with the lived experience of Indigenous and non-Indigenous citizens grappling with the cumulative impacts of colonisation and its legacy for all Australians. Indigenous people have always known that notions of 'pioneering settlement' are a myth and have led the call for a reckoning. Now settler Australians are increasingly acknowledging the dispossession that took place and seeking to reconcile their own sense of belonging under the shadow of history. Across the nation 'occupiers' and First Nations people are creating change through truth-telling as we face the unfinished business of belonging, identity and nationhood.

## WHY THIS STORY?

Reckoning asks two questions. What might truth-telling look like if it is not to be yet another iteration of First Nations revisiting trauma accompanied by settler self-recrimination? And how are people and communities on the ground, non-Indigenous and Indigenous, engaging with truth-telling today? These questions are explored through nationwide, contemporary stories of people and communities struggling with the legacies of colonialism – often collaboratively and in a spirit of listening and dialogue.

Through this questioning lens, *Reckoning* weaves a tapestry of truth-telling stories from across the country in which participants give their own accounts – touching on themes such as ancestry and critical family histories; monuments and memorials; remembering and forgetting; connection with land and place; and literary, historical and artistic endeavours. All with one central aim – to bring the past into the present and understand how the consequences of dispossession roll on today, but in a way that neither perpetuates disempowering feelings of guilt nor undermines the complex realities of colonisation.

## WHY US?

The impetus for *Reckoning* has come from various places, including the work of renowned historians such as Lyndall Ryan and Henry Reynolds, both of whom are supporters of the documentary, and the writings of Kate Grenville, whose *The Secret River* was adapted for TV by Producer Stephen Luby.

Co-writer/Director Steve Thomas reflects that 'Coming from a British background I find I'm increasingly questioning my position as a settler Australian. A repressive upbringing left me intolerant of the hidden, and a theme of my filmmaking has been secrecy and its legacies – be it 'lost' Aboriginal graves, family skeletons, the secret Woomera rocket range, or refugees kept out of sight in remote detention centres. Truth-telling has much to do with hidden stories'.

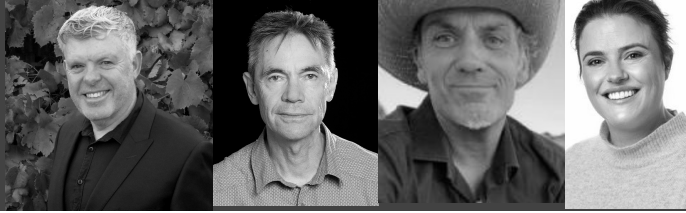
Co-Writer/Executive Producer Steve Kinnane is a Marda Marda from Mirrwoong country in the East Kimberley. His grandmother was removed from the Durack's Argyle Station as a child and raised at the Swan River Native and Half-Caste Mission. Having been involved in truth telling for over 30 years, Steve sees *Reckoning* as 'a means by which to understand the tensions and complexities that we all grapple with in the face of our shared histories on this continent, to learn from the complex choices of individuals in the context of their time and reveal the layered influence of the past in our present'.

## WHY NOW?

Five years ago, First Nations people challenged Australians to heed their call for a voice, treaty and truth-telling. The constitutional change required for the former has recently been rejected in the Referendum although, for example, in Victoria the first truth-telling commission is underway. But what about at an individual and community level? Are there possibilities for agency other than through formal mechanisms?

The development of *Reckoning* will proceed with these questions in mind, exploring in a feature documentary format what truth-telling means for ordinary people and investigating local initiatives that are underway. As Prof Megan Davis has said: 'Reconciliation has stalled because it failed to do what reconciliation should do: *talk about the truth*'. Our aim is to facilitate this long overdue national conversation.





## WHY A DOCUMENTARY?

The power of documentary lies in its ability to move audiences through telling personal stories, creating both empathy and action. Like [Freedom Stories](#), Steve Thomas's previous documentary, *Reckoning* will form a tapestry of unique stories, combining different perspectives on truth-telling and offering models for action.

Documentaries also have the ability to reach a wide audience – whether through national broadcast, global streaming or widespread community screenings. The feature documentary will be the focal point of *Reckoning* but associated educational materials and an effective impact strategy will be developed alongside it, and the film will be repurposed for different audiences (eg. as shorts for schools).

## WHAT WILL YOU SEE?

It would be easy to populate *Reckoning* with grim stories of massacre and frontier violence and we will not shy away from that. But there are also many stories of intercultural cooperation and Indigenous resilience.

Gundagai, for instance, is famous for the Dog on the Tuckerbox, a sculpture celebrating the pioneer spirit. A lesser known story is that of the great flood of 1852, when two Wiradjuri men, Yarri and Jacky Jacky, rescued 69 settlers, half the town's population, with their bark canoes – a selfless and courageous act at a time when their people were being pushed off the land and into exploitative employment. After a campaign by descendants of both sides, a bronze sculpture has been unveiled in the town. And as was noted at the unveiling: 'The funding of permanent and public commemorations of Indigenous leaders, creatives, heroes and their various stories remains a rare occurrence in this country.'



This is just one example. We are happy to share other provisional story ideas currently being researched for *Reckoning* on request.

## WHO IS IN THE TEAM?

To ensure *Reckoning* is made in a spirit of true collaboration we are a team embodying settler and Indigenous perspectives. Co-writer/director [Steve Thomas](#) (*Black Mans Houses* and *Freedom Stories*) and settler producer [Stephen Luby](#) (*The Secret River*) are joined by Indigenous co-writer/executive producer [Steve Kinnane](#) (*The Coolbaroo Club* and *Shadow Lines*) – a coincidental triumvirate of 'Steves'. The project also has the 'critical friend' support of Melbourne University's [Australian Centre](#), through its deputy director and Dharawal/Darug scholar [Dr Julia Hurst](#).

## NEXT STEPS?

*Reckoning* is in its research and development stage. We are currently conducting field research around the country and developing community and participant partnerships. A development grant from [VicScreen](#) is supporting this activity and we are seeking further partners who will provide the necessary support to complete this process and prepare the feature documentary for production.

From the research, storylines will be shortlisted, relationships and permissions negotiated and test footage edited. A script will be developed which, along with a 'teaser' video, will be used to seek the significant production funding required to realise the film, along with a tailored impact strategy and additional educational material. Our aim is to collaborate at every level and with everyone.

*Reckoning* is [registered](#) with [Documentary Australia](#).

# RECKONING

RUBY ENTERTAINMENT IN ASSOCIATION WITH FLYING CARPET FILMS

Stephen Luby: [stephen@rubyentertainment.com.au](mailto:stephen@rubyentertainment.com.au) Mob: 0410 422 556