

RECKONING

a feature documentary



Following the failure of the Voice referendum the filmmakers embark on a road trip around Australia to take the temperature on Truth-telling.

90' feature documentary | producer Stephen Luby | © Ruby Entertainment and Flying Carpet Films 2026

AN INVITATION



An ambitious project such as RECKONING requires a team of exceptional people.
The intent of this document is to introduce you to the feature documentary,
the project team, our Advisory Panel and our need for production funding to complete principal
photography.

We look forward to partnering with you on this exciting stage of our journey.

Thank you for your consideration.

Stephen Luby (Producer)

RECKONING 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 Indigenous and non-Indigenous folk grappling with the legacies of colonisation. The filmmakers, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, embark on a 'both ways' storytelling road trip around Australia – following the path of colonisation and calling in on truth-telling initiatives along the way.

In utilising the latest historical research, Reckoning focusses on First Nations resilience and resistance to colonisation, contemporary efforts to counter its negative impacts and the assertion of Indigenous knowledge. The Voice referendum may have failed but across the country settler and First Nations people are creating change through Truth-telling in a long overdue reckoning with the unfinished business of belonging, identity and nationhood.

Along the way a tapestry of initiatives are explored – we visit memorials to black and white; uncover stories of Indigenous resistance, frontier violence and the secret bone trade; experience creative responses to truth-telling; see land initiatives in action; track descendants undertaking critical family histories; and look at ways of reclaiming culture and exploding the myths of the past. Beyond and beneath the impression created by the Referendum outcome, the truth is being told. But the truth is only worth the trauma if real change occurs as a result.

The impetus for Reckoning comes from the diverse experience of its creative team...

While producing Kate Grenville's The Secret River for TV I felt the vibrations of our history shuddering through me. I experienced a deep compulsion to get this story out to as many Australians as possible. I wanted everyone to feel what I had felt, to be taken out of a debate about 'facts' to a place of deeper understanding. The term was not in use at the time, but I had experienced 'truth-telling' and I wanted more.

Stephen Luby, Producer

My grandmother was removed as a child to the Swan River Native and Half-Caste Mission. Having been involved in truth telling for over 30 years, I see Reckoning as a means to understand the tensions 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 the present.

Steve Kinnane, Executive Producer, Co-writer, Collaborating Director

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, a secret rocket range, or refugees locked in remote detention centres. Truth-telling has much to do with hidden stories.

Steve Thomas, Co-writer, Director

WHY RECKONING?

The Voice Referendum indicated that many Australians see First Nations people and concerns as peripheral to their everyday lives. But beneath that view lies a deal of uncertainty, confusion and curiosity. 'Why wasn't I told?' is a common reaction from people who begin to learn the truth about our history. In Reckoning the filmmakers set out to re-centre their audience by participating personally in challenging 'the great Australian silence'.

Three Steves - Kinnane, Thomas and Luby - each with extensive experience in authorship and filmmaking in this area, have decided to collaborate in making a documentary which will investigate the state of black-white relations on the ground across the nation. The history of this country since 1788 is a story of black-white interaction and this will be a both ways storytelling approach. Kinnane is a marda-marda from the Kimberley. Luby is a settler Australian with roots going back several generations. Thomas is a relatively recent English migrant. Together they set out on a six-week journey to engage with local Truth-telling initiatives across the country...

HOW RECKONING?

Reckoning is a response to the Uluru Statement's invitation to Truth-telling, an attempt to explore the experiences of individuals and communities grappling with the impacts of colonisation and their legacy for all Australians. Perhaps beginning with Victoria's Yoorrook Justice Commission, the filmmakers take a route across the continent which follows the spread of colonisation - from the south-east, northwards and westwards. They call in at cities, townships and communities across five states to meet people of all kinds and backgrounds who are tackling the need for Truth-telling in a myriad of ways. Exploiting the popular trope of the road journey they navigate their exploration from the confines of a Toyota Hilux, with the virtual support of mentors such as First Nations 'critical friend' Dr Julia Hurst (the Australian Centre).

Arriving at communities in a thoughtful, prepared and collaborative way, rather than parachuting in to extract stories and knowledge without return, the filmmakers aim to engage in an inclusive dialogue which has room for multiple perspectives. Open to taking risks, who knows who or what surprises they may encounter or what lessons they will learn?



SOME EXAMPLES OF RECKONING STORIES



Yarri and Jacky Sculpture - Gundagai, NSW

During the great flood of 1852 the new township of Gundagai was engulfed by the swollen Murrumbidgee. 69 settlers, around a third of the population, were rescued from drowning over three days and nights by Wiradjuri men, including Yarri and Jacky Jacky, with their bark canoes. The 80-100 people who drowned represent the most flood fatalities in Australia since colonisation. Now, descendants from both sides have come together to commemorate this act of bravery and resilience with a life-size bronze sculpture set in the main street.



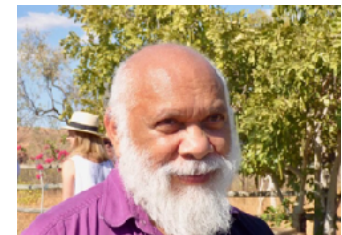
A Tale of Two Memorials - Fremantle & La Grange Bay, WA

On the Fremantle Esplanade is a large marble memorial to three white explorers (quote) 'murdered by treacherous Aborigines at La Grange Bay' in 1864. Some years ago the Karrijarri community persuaded the Fremantle Council to add a plaque to the memorial giving their side of the story. They have recently erected their own memorial at Bidyadanga (La Grange) to the women and children massacred in retaliation for the deaths of the white men - who had ignored protocols, fouled waterholes and threatened violence. Traditional owner and elder Joe Edgar is a descendant of the only survivor of the massacre - his great grandmother, a child at the time.



The Durack Dynasty - Lake Argyle, Kimberley WA

The Irish Duracks made the longest cattle drive in history from southern Queensland to open up the Kimberley to pastoralism in the 1880s and staked claims totalling 3 million acres in the process. Their story was made famous by Dame Mary Durack's novel Kings in Grass Castles. During a recent Durack clan reunion at the site of the original homestead on Lake Argyle, a new family tree was published which acknowledges Indigenous descendants. Thus new possibilities for reconciliation are opened up.



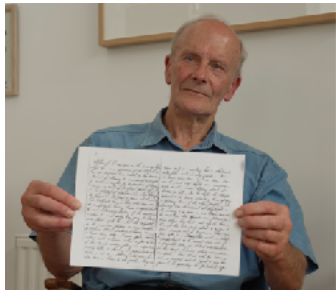
The Battle of Meewah (One Tree Hill) - Toowoomba, Qld

On 12 September 1843 the warrior Multuggerah and his men successfully ambushed a convoy of bullock drays accompanied by heavily armed settlers by barricading the road with logs. The squatters fled and the bullocks were driven off. Later a revenge party was lured up the slopes of One Tree Hill and again defeated when Multuggerah's warriors pelted them with rocks and boulders. Today, this famous victory is publicly commemorated every year in a ceremony overlooking Meewah and acknowledging First People's resistance to colonisation.



Derrawa Dhaura (Yellow Ground) - Yass Valley, NSW

When Sam Vincent took over the running of the family farm from his parents, his friend Dave Johnston, a First Nations archaeologist, identified a large ochre quarry on the property, rich with artefacts and used over thousands of years. Now declared an Aboriginal Heritage Site, Sam is happy that local clans can use the quarry again and keen to tell neighbouring farmers that there's no danger of losing their land.



Dear Mattie - Melbourne, Vic & Borroloola, NT

The story of the discovery and publication of the 'Dear Mattie' letter, a unique first hand account in which the son of a family of Melbourne brewers writes to his sister in 1885 describing a massacre in which he participated at Borroloola in the NT. The language used is shocking to the modern ear eg. 'Killing blacks by the odd ones or twos is no good, nothing but a wholesale slaughter will do any good'. The letter is archived as evidence of one of some 400 massacres across the nation on the University of Newcastle's Colonial Massacre Map - lead researcher the late Prof Lyndall Ryan.



The Bone Trade - Bruny Island, Tas

Cassandra Pybus is a descendant of Richard Pybus who was given large, free land grants on Bruny Island - Truganini's country. Through her interest in the life (and death) of the latter she has extensively researched the illicit 'bone trade', conducted by 'gentlemen of science' and through which human remains were removed to collections all over the world - including from Wybalenna, the 'reserve' on Flinders island to which the survivors of Tasmania's 'Black War' were exiled in the 1830s and where over 150 died. Cassandra's work is an important contribution to the return of remains to First Nations communities.



The Whipping Tree - Warmun, WA

In the remote Indigenous community at Warmun in the Kimberley there's a 'whipping tree', which was used by police to tie Aboriginal people to for beating. There are whippings in living memory and the community has removed the tree but wants to commemorate its significance. Plans are underway to cut through a section of the old tree, add art designs and mount it in place of the whipping tree as a memorial:

This is our place, This is the heart, this bloodwood tree.

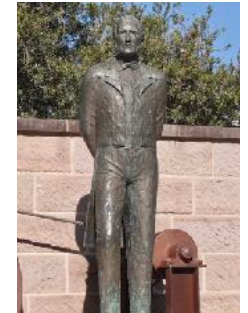
At this place we remember the story of suffering, being chained and 'belted'.

At this place we remember and we forgive. Now we walk on together.



The Pioneer - Wiseman's Ferry, NSW

Kate Grenville's novel *The Secret River* is based on her ancestor Solomon Wiseman, whose sandstone mansion is now a pub with a statue dedicated to the convict turned 'Pioneer, Inn-keeper and Ferry-master'. With the records silent on exactly how Wiseman 'took up' land on the Hawkesbury and amid rumours that he pushed his wife down the stairs and killed her, Kate wonders why this man is memorialised rather than those who were displaced from their land? Now in her new book, *Unsettled*, she tries to restore the original inhabitants to the area around Currabubula in northern NSW, where her grandparents farmed.



Resistance on the Broken River

Benalla has long been known as 'the site of the biggest massacre of whites during colonisation' - when 8 Faithfull brothers stockmen were killed by Aborigines in 1838. Now the Benalla Aboriginal History Group, a collaboration between First Nations and white locals, has done its own research and uncovered the story, not of a massacre but of a fight, and of the ensuing retribution visited on local tribes. The city is having to get used to a new narrative - part of a coordinated uprising of tribes from Port Phillip to southern Queensland against the squatting movement, now documented in historian Stephen Gapp's new book, *Uprising*.



Warrigal Creek - East Gippsland, Vic

Libby Balderstone's farm includes the site of the massacre of 60-150 GunaiKurnai people by Angus McMillan's 'Highland Brigade' in 1843 in retribution for the killing of the son of a squatter. The site is close to the family's homestead on a picturesque bend in the creek. Libby feels a huge responsibility to be a good custodian and wants to share both the place and the truth. But there are obstacles. A confidante is traditional owner and GunaiKurni elder Uncle Russell Mullet.



THE FILMMAKING TEAM



Steve Thomas
Co-writer, Director

His feature documentary Freedom Stories (2015) completed a trilogy on asylum seekers with Hope (2007) and Welcome to Woomera (2004). Earlier films include Black Man's Houses (1992), about Aboriginal survival in Tasmania.

Watch Freedom Stories [HERE](#)
Watch Black Man's Houses [HERE](#)



Dr Julia Hurst
Critical Friend

Julia is Dharawal/Darug Deputy Director of the Australian Centre, University of Melbourne and lecturer in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history.



Steve Kinnane
**Executive Producer, Co-writer,
Collaborating director**

A Marda Marda from the East Kimberley, he co-wrote/produced The Coolbaroo Club for ABC TV about 1960s Aboriginal Perth. His book Shadow Lines (2003) won the WA Premier's Award.

Watch The Coolbaroo Club [HERE](#)



Kimberley Benjamin
Associate Producer

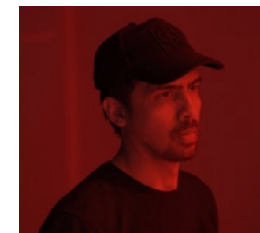
An emerging filmmaker, Kimberley is Yawuru, Bardi and Kija from Broome, WA. She has extensive documentary experience and is committed to telling impactful, social justice stories.



Stephen Luby
Producer

He has won the Screen Producer's Association of Australia 'Producer of the Year' award three times, most recently in 2016 for The Secret River. He also teaches at the VCA Film School, Melbourne University

Watch The Secret River [HERE](#)



Adam Sutardy
Cinematographer

A practising cinematographer and Tutor at the VCA Film School, Adam is of Aboriginal, Indonesian, Scottish and English descent.

RECKONING ADVISERS



Prof Henry Reynolds is a historian and Adjunct Professor in the School of Humanities at the University of Tasmania.



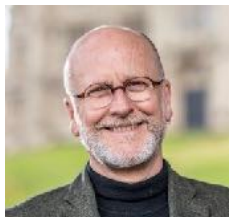
Prof Sandy O'Sullivan is a Wiradjuri, transgender/non-binary Professor in the Department of Indigenous Studies at Macquarie University.



Shino Konishi is a Yawuru historian and Associate Professor in the Schools of Humanities and Indigenous Studies at the University of Western Australia.



Dr Helen Thomas is a psychologist and senior lecturer at Victoria University. She previously led the Social and Emotional Wellbeing team at the Yoorrook Justice Commission.



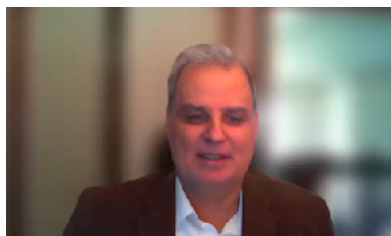
Prof Greg Lehman is a Trawlulwuy art historian, curator, essayist and former Pro Vice-Chancellor, Aboriginal Leadership at the University of Tasmania.



Kevin Bell AO KC was a Commissioner of the Yoorrook Justice Commission. He is a former Judge of the Supreme Court of Victoria and Adjunct Professor in the Faculty of Law at Monash University.



In memory of the late **Prof Lyndall Ryan** - Developer of the University of Newcastle Colonial Massacre Map and an inspiration to this project.



OUR APPROACH



Our approach to documentary making is one that centres the interests of our participants. We will work collaboratively to provide agency for everyone involved and the achievement of mutual aims around truth-telling. Room will be made for the expression of diverse perspectives and key participants will be encouraged to join the project's advisory group for consultation throughout the filmmaking process. Reciprocity will be a key.

Participants will control their own representation and story-telling. This will include rights of consultation, veto and withdrawal throughout production and post-production. The cultural and ethical integrity of the project will be managed with our participants.

Core Tenets of our Approach:

- Advisory panel – made up of Indigenous and non-Indigenous experts plus representatives of participating communities/groups.
- Partnership with participants – sharing of creative control via meaningful and ongoing consultation and collaboration, including during editing.
- Consent configured as an ongoing process, including the right to withdraw and veto over edited footage related to each participant/ community through to completion of editing and distribution.
- Principles of reciprocity and compensation for time donated..
- Formal recognition of the Traditional Owners of lands filmed on.
- Attribution – appropriate acknowledgement to be made of individual or community ownership of any authored cultural material used in the film, such as paintings, songs, dances, photography, film, etc.
- Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property rights – consultation, clearance and acknowledgement (including payment where appropriate) of ICIP where use is made of eg. archival material, imagery, Indigenous knowledge, filmed landscapes.
- Shared profit arrangement with participants/communities appearing in the film.

PATHWAY TO AUDIENCE

WHY A FEATURE DOCUMENTARY?

The power of documentary lies in its ability to move audiences through telling personal stories, assisting audiences to put themselves in other people's shoes and inspiring both empathy and action. Reckoning will explore what truth-telling can mean for ordinary people and the kind of change it can invoke, whether attitudinally or practically. Like [Freedom Stories](#), Steve Thomas's previous feature documentary, Reckoning will form a tapestry of unique stories. It will combine different perspectives on truth-telling and offer models for action.

WHO IS THE AUDIENCE?

Our audience is the whole of Australia (white and black) and beyond. Documentaries have the potential to reach a wide audience - whether through broadcasts, streaming, community screenings or education. 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.

An experienced Impact Producer will be employed to drive and oversee the Pathway to Audience strategy. Filmmakers are constantly improving on impact and we acknowledge reference to important precedents such as *In My Blood It Runs*, *Like My Brother*, *My Name is Gulpilil* and *Ten Canoes*.

IMPACT STRATEGY

- [Cinema release](#)

National cinema release via appropriate distributor or contracted agent.

- [Publicity and promotion campaign \(incl social media\)](#)

Publicity Agent and Impact Producer tailor campaign to cinema release.

- [International Festivals](#)

Premiere at MIFF followed by targeted festival release over the following 12 months.

- [TV and/or streaming acquisition](#)

The feature will be submitted to mainstream broadcasters and streaming platforms with possible repurposing as 50' version for TV or 2 x 45' version for streaming.

- [Community screenings](#)

National program of community screenings sponsored and organised by regional and local community orgs dedicated to First Nations development. An envelope containing resource materials to be placed on every seat (ditto cinema release whenever possible).

- [Partnering with national organisations](#)

Discussions are beginning with organisations interested in promoting Reckoning to their client bases.

- [ATOM Study Kit](#)

Australian Teachers of Media is the acknowledged producer of Study Guides for schools.

- [Repurposing of material](#)

Digital technology makes it possible to repurpose material for niche audiences. We have experience of this through *Freedom Stories* (eg. creation of shorts tailored to classroom use).

- [Educational distribution](#)

Ronin Films is the acknowledged leader in distribution to schools and is keen to acquire Reckoning.

- [Website](#)

A dedicated and interactive website will be designed to service and resource the various uses and applications of Reckoning.

EXCERPTS FROM LETTERS OF SUPPORT

Combining multiple narratives across time, Reckoning steps into diversity and complexity of storytelling. The documentary follows key examples of how Indigenous and Settler lives are inextricably linked, both historically and contemporarily. - **Dr Julia Hurst**

Truth-telling, and what one does with the truth, continues to be an urgent and ongoing task for our nation. These filmmakers are to be congratulated for conceiving a project which will exploit the popularity of the visual medium to show how this process is taking root at a community level in diverse and intriguing ways. - **Prof Henry Reynolds**

We share the goals of the Reckoning filmmakers in their exploration of truth telling, what that means and how positive community change can be achieved. This is a very live issue in our region and we've been impressed with their determination to ensure that the concept for a film is built with First Nations involvement from the ground up. - **Benalla Aboriginal History Group**

The Meewah Committee is dedicated to our shared history and the journey of seeking truth. We do this learning from the wisdom of First People and sharing knowledge with the wider community. These aims align with those of the filmmaking team responsible for the Reckoning documentary and we have embarked on sharing information with one another. - **Amy Cook**

Having met with and discussed the vision behind the team's documentary project, I believe Reckoning offers a timely and powerful platform for amplifying voices that have too often been silenced. This documentary will help share the truth of our shared history, bringing to light stories of injustice, strength, and survival that Australia and the world needs to hear. - **Shannon Bauwen, Gunningurru Aboriginal Corporation**

Reckoning is an important undertaking in the post-referendum context and in the broader context of how Australia is to grapple with its Indigenous history in order better to understand the past, the impact of the past upon the present and how this may help to create a better future. - **Kevin Bell**

The commitment of our Sculpture Project to truth-telling and reconciliation is illustrative of the themes to be explored by the creative team behind the exciting documentary project, Reckoning, with whom we are pleased to have formed a collaborative relationship. - **Gundagai Yarri and Jacky Jacky Sculpture Committee**

BUDGET TO SHOOT THE ENTIRE DOCUMENTARY...

TARGET BUDGET:

\$105k*

*PLUS secondments & in-kind support from
VCA Film School

Currently in Hand:

Donations \$10k

FRRR Victoria \$10k

FRRR NSW \$10k

Toowoomba RADF \$15k

Philanthropy Commitments in-principle \$35k

TOTAL \$80k



Ruby Entertainment & Flying Carpet Films | Producer Stephen Luby | 0410 422 556 |
stephen@rubyentertainment.com.au