

Letter to the Editor

**Barbara Livesey, chief executive Reconciliation Australia
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The Australian's ongoing interest in Indigenous Affairs is diminished by it continuing to support two myths – one, that you can separate the practical and symbolic elements of reconciliation and two, that there is evidence to support the case for abolishing the permit system. (Editorial 17 January)

Symbolic acts like the forthcoming apology are fundamentally about building mutually respectful relationships as the foundation for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians moving forward together – acknowledging our shared history and looking to a shared future.

We know in all walks of life, from business to sport, that success is built on people working together and respecting each other. Only an Aboriginal Australian who feels their views, culture and history are respected will have the confidence and the hope they need to overcome problems and succeed.

On the second point, dysfunction in remote Aboriginal communities is a reality but submissions to last year's Senate Committee inquiry into the NT were overwhelmingly supportive of the permit system in protecting communities from exploitation. The Police Federation of Australia told the inquiry there was no convincing case of "any connection between the permit system and child sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities". The PFA argued that changes to the permit system were unwarranted.

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