

Time to heal Country: Thorpe

NAIDOC Week started as a protest movement in 1938 to fight for rights and the plight of First Nations people in this country. It is an incredibly important day for us.

This year's theme is particularly important to all of us, whether you are First Nations or not. Heal Country.

Now more than ever, we need to Heal Country.

As a proud First Nations woman, my ancestral home includes Gunnai country which takes in most of Gippsland.

Like you, I love our Country.

My ancestors walked and cared for Country for more than 60,000 years. My song lines have run through this, the most beautiful place in the world, since time began. These songlines connect us to each other, to our culture, land, water and sky.

Our relationship with Country is inseparable from our understanding of what it means to be a First Nations person.

We are not from Country, we are part of Country.

Our ancestors didn't treat Country like something to own. We didn't mine our Country. We didn't frack our Country. We didn't log or clear our country. We didn't divert rivers on our Country.

But in the past 200 years of colonisation, Country has become very sick.

It's sick because of the exploitation and destruction caused by mining, by land clearing, by logging, by poisoning our waterways, by taking more than we need.

NAIDOC is more important now



Greens Senator, Lidia Thorpe, grew up in East Gippsland and returns regularly to connect with family and Country. She is pictured at a recent protest in Bairnsdale. (PS)

than it has ever been. We need all people to stand up for Country and love and care for it in the way that my people always have.

In order to heal Country, we need to not only prevent further damage and destruction but also repair the damage and destruction that has happened since colonisation.

This damage and destruction is

occurring all around the world. The colonial mindset of exploit, destroy and commodify has become the norm.

As a consequence, our whole planet is sick.

But ask yourself, who is making our Country and our planet sick? It's not average people who are trying hard to put food on the table, keep

the lights on, raise families and live a good life.

It's the billionaires and big corporations that make a killing while they're killing our Country, our climate and our future.

In Australia, Labor and Liberal get millions in donations from the coal and gas industry. Labor and Liberal then give taxpayer money to coal and gas projects and hand out billions every year in tax subsidies to these billionaires and corporations, while they pay almost no tax, in so doing robbing us all of good schools, hospitals and parks.

Just the other week, Labor and Liberal voted to open up huge areas of the Beetaloo basin in the Northern Territory to fracking for gas, which will cook the climate and poison the nearby water. They also voted to use millions in taxpayer money to do this. The Traditional Owners of that Country said 'no' but Labor and Liberal didn't listen to them, they only listened to their gas donors.

We can be better, because we have been better. First Nations people hold the knowledge on how to protect and heal Country and how to flourish on it.

This is why the Greens want to see coal, gas and oil phased out by 2030. We want to see a just transition for all workers and communities that rely on these industries.

There is no other country in the world that has the opportunity to run on 100 per cent renewable electricity and become a renewable energy superpower, creating and exporting it to the rest of the world through renewable hydrogen, solar electricity and other technologies.

Instead of being bought off by billionaires and big corporations, Labor and Liberal need to join the Greens and come up with a real plan to heal our Country and be part of the global solution to the climate crisis.

The Greens also want to transition out of logging in native forests to 100 per cent plantations, which will protect our precious wildlife and ensure the water we drink is clean and pure. This will give timber workers and communities sustainable, long-term jobs in a sustainable industry.

The world is starting to wake up to the fact that if we make Country sick, Country will not be able to look after us.

Australia risks being left behind the rest of the world and the action other countries are taking to reduce carbon pollution and to protect the wild places we have left.

I invite everyone, whether or not you are First Nations, to stand together and demand that our leaders do more to heal Country, to ensure the air we breathe and water we drink is clean and healthy and to stop selling out to billionaires and corporations at the expense of the rest of us.

We need to urgently redefine the relationship we have with Country and in turn Country will look after us.

Together we can heal and protect Country for our children, grandchildren and the many generations to follow.

Written by Lidia Thorpe, Gunnai Gunditjmarra woman and Greens Senator for Victoria.