

I am writing in response to the article 'Freedom Ride Going Off Track' published on the 6<sup>th</sup> January 2015 in First Nations Telegraph. The article made a number of incorrect statements about plans to commemorate the Freedom Ride 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Unfortunately the author of the article Ghillar Michael Anderson, did not check his information before it was published. Neither did the editor. Both have since apologised for what was written. The editor has asked me to clarify some of the mistakes in the article for the communities benefit. So I hope in writing to straighten out a few things.

We are six weeks away from the commemoration and time is very short. Lots of people are working very hard to give the Freedom Ride the appropriate recognition it deserves. The author of the article Michael Anderson understands the significance of the Freedom ride as it changed his life and his family was directly affected and involved. I know that he wrote the article because he wants the events to be the best they can and he was worried about the gossip and misinformation he heard. There are many people who want it to be properly done and want appropriate recognition of the extraordinary people who paid a price by standing by the students and fighting for our peoples rights long before and after the Freedom Ride.

The first inaccuracy to be clarified is that at no stage has Noel Pearson been approached or considered to participate in the events surrounding the Freedom Ride. This suggestion has no basis. Rather and appropriately, the events are focused on the Aboriginal communities where the Ride visited and the original Freedom riders themselves, who we hope to bring together for the anniversary.

Second, I did not approach the NSW Aboriginal Land Council for funds as quoted in the article '*for the purpose of having Rachel Perkins followed by a film crew from which a movie would be made*'. I am not planning to make a film as I already have – 20 years ago and with my father. I have made 100 free copies of this original documentary available, at my own cost, to give to communities and schools for free for educational purposes. This offer for free copies went out in the NSW Aboriginal Land Council newsletter in December. Send me an email if you also want one on behalf of your community group to: [Rachel@blackfellafilms.com.au](mailto:Rachel@blackfellafilms.com.au)

Third, the NSW Aboriginal Land Council agreed to become involved in the events after the consideration of their full board. Myself and others met with their board at the invitation of their Chairperson. The article suggests that the potential partnership was a result of nepotism between the CEO and myself. This is not the case. To suggest otherwise undermines the integrity of these elected community leaders and their power to make decisions as board members.

Furthermore arrangements have begun with local communities, to date in Moree, which has set up a committee to commemorate the events. Further meetings are planned in a number of towns and it is hoped that families directly involved in the Freedom Ride will participate. Communities are also planning their own events off their own bat and it our plan is to work in partnership with them as much as possible.

There are some final meetings that need to take place with local communities to finalise planning. Once this has occurred an announcement will be made about some of the events happening across NSW. So stay tuned for more details.

Finally on a personal note I wish to clarify my involvement. I have been volunteering my time to organize events because people like Gary Williams and Jim Spigelman, who were on the Freedom Ride, and others like Lyall Munro Jnr whose life was changed as a result of the Ride, asked me to. I felt obliged to them and to honour the memory of my late father Charles Perkins, who was part of the Freedom Ride. I believe it is important on this occasion, to stand together as Aboriginal people. I look forward standing with you to pay respect to this important historical event for our people.