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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**PROOF**

**Federation Chamber**

**ADJOURNMENT**

**Apology to Australia's Indigenous  
Peoples: 10th Anniversary**

**SPEECH**

**Thursday, 15 February 2018**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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<b>Questioner</b>	<b>Responder</b>
<b>Speaker</b> Marles, Richard, MP	<b>Question No.</b>

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**Mr MARLES** (Corio) (12:31): After the Tourism Australia ad that premiered during the Super Bowl, the member for Corangamite and I had fun last week with the idea of a new Crocodile Dundee movie being filmed in Geelong. This week the parliament has commemorated the 10th anniversary of the apology to the Stolen Generation. It truly was a remarkable event in the life of this parliament and in the life of this nation. In a larger sense, the apology was a grand act of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia. Much more needs to be done in closing the gap, but the significance of the apology in the history of Indigenous relations cannot be overstated. This anniversary has been a reminder to me of a much earlier story of goodwill between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia which occurred in the first years of European settlement. It's a story I have spoken about previously in this place.

William Buckley was a former bricklayer and soldier sentenced to 14 years transportation to the New South Wales penal colony for having knowingly received a bolt of stolen cloth. In 1803 Buckley was aboard HMS *Calcutta* when it entered Port Phillip in an attempt to establish a new penal colony in Port Phillip Bay. The attempt at establishing a new penal colony failed but, prior to the party leaving, Buckley and a number of other convicts made an escape on 27 December. The group ran away from the main camp at a site close to where Sorrento is today. As they made their way around the bay, the group broke up and Buckley found himself alone moving around the western side of Port Phillip Bay. Survival in the Victorian bushland was no easy task for Buckley.

By the time Buckley reached present day Geelong on the Bellarine Peninsula, he was close to death. It was here he encountered the Wathawurrung people, the traditional owners of the land around Geelong and the Bellarine. Buckley was a tall man, six foot eight inches by some accounts, and at this point was in his early 20s. One can only imagine what the Wathawurrung people made of him when they came across him in his weakened and ailing state. In this moment they were faced with a range of choices. A fear of the unknown might have seen them kill Buckley—a sad outcome but one hardly unprecedented in human experience. Perhaps a more likely choice might simply have been to leave Buckley alone and let nature take its course—no aggressive acts committed but at the same time no risk taken in respect of a being the like of which the Wathawurrung people had never seen before. But, instead, a far more unlikely and amazing path was taken.

The Wathawurrung people took Buckley in, returned him to health and ultimately made him one of their own. Over the next 32 years, Buckley lived with them and became a husband, a father and ultimately an elder of that community. Buckley was presumed dead and the original party left Port Phillip in 1803. In 1835 a small and isolated number of English settlers had been sent as an advance party to again try and establish a settlement in Port Phillip. As they waited on the beach for supplies and other settlers to arrive by boat, William Buckley emerged from the bush dressed in kangaroo skins, carrying Aboriginal weapons and had forgotten how to speak English. It was via a tattoo that Buckley was able to establish who he was.

In this moment Buckley returned the favour of 32 years prior. As tensions rose between the new settlers and the Wathawurrung people Buckley was able to intervene to prevent an outbreak of hostilities. In 1836 Buckley had rejoined the colonists and was given the position of interpreter to the Indigenous population. He was a guide for English military figures and dignitaries, and was called upon for his grasp of the Aboriginal language. By 1837 Buckley left for Tasmania. He married, lived for another 19 years and died in Hobart in 1856 at the age of 76.

The tale of William Buckley is genuinely amazing. The chance of a person lost re-emerging from the wilderness after 32 years is what's behind the phrase 'You've got Buckley's chance'. It's more extraordinary than Tom Hanks' *Castaway*, yet it is a true story. But it also contains within it a hopeful message of how Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians can take a positive path and work together. When we talk about making a movie in Geelong, this is the movie that should be made in Geelong. In February 2009 I said in this place:

In the history of Australia both Indigenous and non-Indigenous surely William Buckley's life must be one of the most extraordinary lives ever lived on this continent. It is an extraordinary story; they ought to make a movie about it.

I call on this again today. A made-for-TV movie, *The Extraordinary Tale of William Buckley* in April 2010, was a dramatised documentary which told Buckley's story. The last time the TV documentary aired was in 2014 on the ABC. But this story needs to go mainstream and it deserves to be on the big screen. Geelong has been the host to major blockbuster productions—*The Dressmaker* made \$24 million at the box office. Its filming locations included Mount Rothwell, north of the You Yangs, and Little River, amongst others. A *Crocodile Dundee* remake set in Geelong would be great, but the story of William Buckley would be truly great for the city. William Buckley's story needs to hit the big screen.