

CHAPTER 5: Parliamentary Speeches by the Hon Charlie Lynn MLC re the Kokoda Trail: 1998-2015

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The Hon. Charlie John Stuart LYNN, OAM, psc (1945 -)

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PARLIAMENTARY SPEECHES BY THE HON CHARLIE LYNN MLC RE THE KOKODA TRAIL: 1998 - 2014

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5 May 1998: Olympic Torch – Kokoda Trail

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Hansard/Pages/HansardResult.aspx#/docid/HANSARD-1820781676-14744/link/2117>

The Hon. C. J. S. LYNN [10.09 p.m.]: Last week I expressed my satisfaction at the announcement of the Prime Minister's desire for the Olympic torch to be carried across the Kokoda Track en route from Athens to the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. However, I was disappointed when I learned that the President of the Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games, Michael Knight, and two members of the Australian Olympic Committee, John Coates and Phil Coles, rejected the idea. The ignorance and the arrogance of these three bureaucrats is breathtaking. As bureaucrats their job is to implement the policy and direction of our democratically elected political leaders - not to dismiss them because of their own ignorance and prejudice. I was further concerned to learn of the outcome of a reconnaissance in Papua New Guinea by Commonwealth, SOCOG and New South Wales Police Service personnel between 30 March and 3 April 1998. The report from the New South Wales Olympic security command centre includes the following assessment:

. . . It is our firm advice that under no circumstances should the Olympic flame be taken over the length of the Kokoda Trail.

The position stated above does not, however, prohibit the Olympic flame having contact with aspects of the Kokoda Trail. It will be possible to protect both the personnel and equipment involved in the relay, provided there is only limited involvement with the Kokoda Trail. If the Olympic flame is to travel outside the metropolitan area of Port Moresby, I support the position . . . that the torch be taken by helicopter from Jackson's International Airport to Owers Corner . . . the relay could then be conducted in a limited form with various way points staged at significant locations along the Sogeri Road . . . The physical conditions, isolation and communications difficulties prevent the consideration of any other approach.

This reconnaissance was obviously conducted from the comfort of an aircraft flying high above the Owen Stanley Range. Napoleon once said, "Time spent on a well-planned reconnaissance is seldom wasted. Time spent on an unplanned reconnaissance is often wasted." This was obviously an unplanned reconnaissance, because those responsible did not examine the route on foot; nor did they consult the most experienced people with an interest in the Kokoda Track or its people, the Kioari. As a result, the report they produced is inaccurate and misleading. I find it incredible that such an incompetent reconnaissance could be conducted by people charged with providing advice to the Prime Minister. If this is the standard of professionalism of the New South Wales Olympic security command, we risk being branded as the keystone cops from down under.

The standard of the reconnaissance and the quality of the report indicate we have learned little from the ridiculous orders and directions our Diggers were given by the political and military bureaucrats during the Kokoda campaign. For example, in 1942 Lieutenant Bert Kniezle, a plantation owner from Kokoda, was ordered by the Australian command to build a road across the Kokoda Track, and was given four months to complete the task. His response was reported to have been unprintable.

After the battle for Isurava, from 26 to 30 August 1942, the Australians were fighting a desperate withdrawal operation back along the track. During this phase they received an order from the Australian command to blow the Kokoda gap - somebody had obviously read of the battle for Thermopylae. Unfortunately, the Kokoda gap is approximately 11 kilometres wide - it was named by pilots to distinguish it from a false gap immediately to the east. It would have taken a lot of dynamite to blow it up. These ridiculous orders were on a similar scale to the security assessment just completed by the New South Wales Olympic security command centre.

My comments on this report are, first, that the proposed torch relay will be conducted during the dry season. It is possible for the relay to commence at Owers Corner at 7 o'clock in the morning, in time for the morning news in Australia, and to finish at Kokoda at 5 o'clock in the afternoon, in time for the evening news. This will be achieved by having 100 Koiari runners, who are sons and grandsons of the legendary Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels, run one kilometre each at a seven minutes per kilometre pace. The personal record to run the track is held by Kokoda guide Osborne Bogajaiwa, who ran from Kokoda to Owers Corner in 29 hours

Second, the Kokoda Track runs from Central Province to Oro Province, but all the people along it are Koiari. The Koiari people want to carry the torch along the track, and anybody who knows anything about Papua New Guinea would understand that the torch will be absolutely secure in the Koiari's hands. Third, the "isolation and communication difficulties" referred to simply do not exist. In the 100 kilometres between Owers Corner and Kokoda there are airfields at Kokoda, Kagi, Efogi, Menari and Nauro villages. In addition, there is helicopter access at Deniki, Isurava, Alola, Templeton's Crossing, Brigade Hill and Uberi.

Finally, during my trek last week I used a Telstra satellite phone to make calls to Australia each day. In addition, I also presented 15 high frequency radios to the Koiari Development Authority so that in the near future each village will have radio communication. The Australian Army has also installed very high frequency relay stations along the track. Consequently, one can now talk to anybody, at anytime, anywhere in the world, from any location along the track.

It seems that our bureaucrats have learned nothing from the lessons of the Kokoda campaign. I have walked the track 20 times, more than any other Australian. I also have 21 years' experience in the Army and would have expected to have been asked for advice if the bureaucrats were fair dinkum about preparing a proper report. One hundred days have been allocated for the Olympic torch relay to allow as many Australians as possible to celebrate the greatest sporting event at the dawn of the new millennium. I believe we should allow 99 days for this celebration and set aside just one day for commemoration. The carriage of the torch along the Kokoda Track would be a fitting tribute and a symbolic salute to the sacrifice made by past Australians to the peace and prosperity we enjoy today. I hope that SOCOG bureaucrats put their personal prejudices aside and honour the wish of all Australians that those who served and those who died so that we may live will be paid that fitting tribute.

6 April 2000: Hosting of Kokoda Chief: Mr Murphy Sambijo

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Hansard/Pages/HansardResult.aspx#/docid/HANSARD-1820781676-20187/link/2117>

The Hon. C. J. S. LYNN [5.08 p.m.]: Today I had the honour of hosting a guest to Australia and to this Parliament, Mr Murphy Sambijo, a chief of the village at Kokoda. This evening I would like to pay tribute to the work he has done in the past few years as a site manager for Rotary's Kokoda Memorial Hospital, which is a major contribution to looking after the health needs of the people of Oro province in the Kokoda area. It is a pity that on his first visit to Sydney he woke up to the news that the Kokoda Track Memorial at Concord had been vandalised. I explained to Murphy that the matter would be debated in this Parliament but that the answer to vandalism to the Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway and at other war memorials is not about barricades and increased fines but education. If people do not understand the significance of these important memorials, they will not have any respect for what they represent. Murphy also expressed concern at the bad press Kokoda receives when, most often, that bad press is not the result of events that happen on the Kokoda track.

For example, one assault at Kokoda in January was reported widely in the media in Australia. As a result the Australian High Commission issued a travellers' warning for visitors going to Kokoda.

Unfortunately, the warning has not been revisited. This has stopped people going across the Kokoda Track. This year hardly anybody has gone across the track and there are no bookings. This means that the trekking industry that we were developing there has fallen away. The guides that Murphy was assisting to train are now out of work.

This is sad because Papua New Guinea does not have a welfare system as we have. As we were just starting to get this industry off the ground it has been cruelled by bad press. Murphy also finds it very difficult to understand that the one assault gained wide publicity and stopped people from going there, whilst at the same time there have been 40 shootings in south-western Sydney, police stations have been shot at, police cars have been shot at and the other night a policeman had to shoot somebody in self-defence. Murphy thought that if anybody was deserving of a traveller's warning it would be someone from Papua New Guinea travelling to south-western Sydney.

Another issue which is not doing Papua New Guineans any good is the issue of the Olympic torch. Murphy was most disappointed that the Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games [SOCOG] rejected the proposal to run the torch across the Kokoda Track as a tribute to the sacrifice that was made by the Koairi people, the fuzzy-wuzzy angels, in our hour of need and to the diggers that served there. But SOCOG deliberately set out to create the impression that it was going to take the torch on Kokoda. It used the name Kokoda Track. It actually stole the name Kokoda.

As I explained to Murphy, if the Koairi people used the Sydney 2000 logo or if they used the Olympic rings in a promotion they wanted to do the ugly face of capitalism in Sydney would take legal action against them for breach of copyright. But it is okay for SOCOG to steal their name and not give them any sort of compensation. SOCOG knows that the torch will not go anywhere near Kokoda. The torch is being flown to Owers Corner, which is not on the Kokoda Track; it is only on the start of the track. There will be a small ceremony there, flying back to a little place called Efogi at a memorial and then trucking out to the edge of Port Moresby, doing a little bit of a run there.

SOCOG will then be able to say, "Thanks for your vote to get the Olympics. We have done our four hours that we promised you. We have created the impression that we are going on Kokoda when we had no intention of going to Kokoda. We are not going to Kokoda but thanks for allowing us to steal your name." That creates a lot of mistrust among the Kaairi people. As I explained to Murphy, the key to the future recognition of Kokoda is in education because if people are educated, if military studies are in our education system, people will understand the significance of these memorials and of the Kokoda Track, and they will have much more respect for them.

12 November 2003: The Kokoda Track Foundation

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Hansard/Pages/HansardResult.aspx#/docid/HANSARD-1820781676-30501/link/2117>

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN [9.44 p.m.]: Last Saturday I was a keynote speaker for the Services Clubs Association of New South Wales at its annual convention in Canberra. My talk was based on the Kokoda campaign in Papua New Guinea [PNG] during the period from July to November 1942. Later that evening I briefed the club representatives on the Kokoda Track Foundation that we have recently established to provide educational and health support to the Koiari and Orokaiva people who live in villages along the track. These are the grandsons and granddaughters of the fuzzy-wuzzy angels who helped us when we needed it during our darkest days in 1942. Many were never paid for the work they did for our Diggers and, to our great shame, none has ever received a medal. Our friends in PNG now need our help. We have not managed our relationship at all well since they gained independence in 1975 and much of our aid has been wasted. PNG does not have a welfare system and the people who live along the track operate a subsistence economy.

The devaluation of their national currency, the Kina, over recent years has caused a rationalisation in the provision of air services to many of the villages. As a result, many of them are not able to get their fruit and vegetables to markets in Port Moresby. The Kokoda Track itself has been neglected by successive governments since the end of the war. Until the opening of a new memorial at Isurava last year there was not a single monument along the track and most of the battle sites have been reclaimed by the jungle. Over recent years more and more Australians are visiting PNG to trek across the Kokoda Track. This has included corporate training groups, school groups, professional sporting groups, descendants of veterans who fought in the campaign and other adventurous individuals with an interest in our military history. Those who make the journey are humbled by the hospitality they receive from their guides and porters and from the people who live in the villages.

Sadly, they are also struck by the lack of educational and health facilities in the villages, the evidence of malnutrition and malaria amongst the younger ones and the lack of opportunity they have for the future. The Kokoda Track Foundation was formed to address these issues. One of the primary objectives of the foundation is to have the Kokoda Track established as a national memorial park with a view to creating a self-sustaining eco-adventure tourism industry for the Koiari and Orokaiva people who live along it. We are hopeful that this will serve as a model for other eco-adventure tourism opportunities in Papua New Guinea. As a first step in developing this strategy we are hosting a workshop at the University of Technology that will include representatives from Australia and PNG. It will be facilitated by two international experts on eco-tourism in Third World countries. We are indebted to Oil Search PNG for its generous support for the workshop.

On 20 August 2003 the foundation hosted a leadership oration in honour of Lieutenant-Colonel Ralph Honner DSO MC, who was the commander of the 39th Battalion at the battle for Isurava. The foundation raised \$12,000 from the oration, and this will be used to train a paramedic from each village and to establish a medical aid station within each village. Our next objective was to raise funds to support the educational development of young village students. It costs about \$1,000 to pay for full board, books, uniforms and school fees at the PNG national high school at Sogeri. When I briefed the service clubs representatives on this need their support was immediate and overwhelming. Merrylands RSL and Canterbury-Hurlstone Park RSL contributed \$10,000 each. Rooty Hill RSL and the Albury Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen's clubs gave \$5,000 each. Swansea RSL, Cardiff RSL, Pelican Flat RSL and Lidcombe RSL each gave \$1,000.

Many other clubs gave a commitment to support proposals at upcoming board meetings. To date the foundation has received \$38,000. The PNG Department of Education has been advised and is in the process of selecting students from village schools to prepare for their first year at Sogeri High School for the start of the 2004 school year. The Treasurer should take careful note of this generosity because it goes to the heart of what the services clubs are all about. These clubs realise they have to live in a modern competitive economy and that they have serious community obligations. Seminars such as that conducted by the Services Clubs Association last weekend are designed to improve management and marketing practices so clubs can better serve their local communities. They also play a pivotal role in providing facilities and support for our aged veterans and our seniors.

Most of the valuable community work they do does not appear on the Treasury balance sheets because they operate below the radar of the bean counters. I have also observed that a large number of Vietnam veterans are involved in the running of these services clubs. These veterans are the custodians of our proud military heritage at the local level in our rural, regional and urban communities. The sum of these communities represents our Australian identity today. These blokes do not drive flash cars and they do not have money stashed away in Swiss bank accounts. What they do have they give to their fellow veterans who need help and to their local communities. They are the dinkum article and you do not have to be in their company for very long to become aware of the strong bonds that exist between them and the strong sense of compassion they have for their communities.

The Premier and the Treasurer have to be very careful they do not destroy these unique Australian community organisations because of an overzealous approach from the economic rationalists in Treasury. Government is not capable of filling the social and community void their demise would cause. I am indebted to the Services Clubs Association for its spontaneous and generous support to the Kokoda Track Foundation. The educational sponsorships they have provided will give hope to those who do not have a great deal going for them at the moment, and I hope it might serve to remind the Premier and the Treasurer of what these services clubs are all about.

26 October 2004: Death of Mr Stevem Lila Soru and Mr Kobe Charlie

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Hansard/Pages/HansardResult.aspx#/docid/HANSARD-1820781676-32587/link/2117>

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN [10.06 p.m.]: Tonight I mourn the tragic deaths of two young Papua New Guinean boys whom I have come to know during my involvement with the Kokoda Track Foundation. Steven Lila Soru was one of 30 students from villages across the Kokoda Track sponsored by the Kokoda Track Foundation to study at Sogeri National High School, Iaowari Secondary School and Popondetta Provincial High School as a boarding student. He was 17 years of age and came from Alola Village, which is about five hours trekking time, for us anyway, from Kokoda up into the Owen Stanley Ranges. He was a grade 9 student. On the night of 22 July Steven was in his dormitory around 5.00 a.m. when he was taken ill. He rushed to the doorway of the dormitory to be sick. He lost his balance and fell onto rocks beneath the stair landing. He was seriously injured and was carried back to his bed by his fellow students.

The next morning they realised Steven was seriously injured and reported to the Deputy Principal, Mr Avosa Kave, who arranged urgent transport of Steven to the Port Moresby General Hospital, which is about 20 kilometres away. The fall had impacted Steven's head into his body, broke his neck in two places and twisted his spinal cord. He was paralysed from the neck down. Steven's mother, Mrs Fagaisa Lila Soru, and his brothers and sisters were called to his bedside and remained with him until he passed away two days later. The tragedy of Steven's death is that it was a preventable accident. The school had recently performed some maintenance on the landing of the stairs and the stairway but had not installed a simple handrail. If it had, Steven would be alive today. I have visited Iaowari High School on a number of occasions in my role as Chairman of the Kokoda Track Foundation to discuss their needs and to see what help we might be able to provide.

Their needs are great but the state of the dormitory accommodation for boarding students is an area that needs urgent attention. In fact, the conditions are so bad that they would be condemned anywhere in Australia. Notwithstanding the conditions, the spirit and the morale of the teachers and students were noteworthy. They realise that the key to their individual and collective future is education and they feel privileged that at least they have an opportunity to learn. I have discussed the needs of these schools with Mr Bede Long and Mr John Sim of Lions International in Sydney. They have been instrumental in establishing our New South Wales Parliamentary Lions Club and have agreed to enlist the support of Lions International to plan and co-ordinate a building refurbishment program in these schools. I hope that Steven's death was not in vain and that it will act as a reminder of the assistance we can and must provide to our brothers in Papua New Guinea.

A week after Steven died we suffered another tragic loss when one of my recent guides, Kobe Charlie, also of Alola village, was murdered south of his village on the Kokoda Track at Eora Creek. The Kokoda Track is used by people from the Highlands, who travel via Popondetta and Kokoda to trek across the Owen Stanley Ranges to Port Moresby and vice-versa. The local people suspect it was one of these groups of about five people who were sighted in the area at the time. Kobe had also recently accompanied an awareness patrol from the newly formed Kokoda Track Authority across the track. Their purpose was to discuss the outcomes of a workshop that the Kokoda Track Foundation had

conducted amongst clan leaders and landowners in Efogi village as part of the process of developing a strategic plan for the area.

The aim of the Kokoda Track Foundation is to have the Kokoda Track proclaimed as a national memorial park, with a view to establishing a self-sustaining eco-trekking industry for the Koiari and Orokaiva people who live along the track. The process is being led by Kelvin Templeton, former chief executive officer of the Sydney Swans and now with Templeton Galt and facilitated by Dr Stephen Wearing of the University of Technology, Sydney, and Mr Paul Chatterton of the World Wide Fund for Nature in Madang. All are providing their services on a voluntary basis and I commend them for that. The Kokoda Track Special Purpose Authority has been established by the Papua New Guinea Department of Provincial and Local Government Affairs and comprises representatives of the landowners along the track, provincial governments from Central and Oro Province, the Papua New Guinea National Cultural Commission, the Papua New Guinea Tourism Authority and stakeholder representatives, representing tour operators, the RSL and Rotary.

It is a unique organisation in Papua New Guinea, as it has its own income stream, independent of government and aid agencies. During the workshop in Efogi they developed their own slogan, which was "working together for good tourism". According to Paul Chatterton of the World Wide Fund for Nature, this is the best ecotourism model being developed in Papua New Guinea because it has brought different clans, landowner groups, local level government authorities and provincial governments together to work for common goals with shared benefits. Steven Soru and Kobe Charlie were to have been part of this exciting future for the Koiari and Orokaiva people along the Kokoda Track, but they have been tragically taken from us. I would like to think that their deaths will not have been in vain and I will be looking at ways to commemorate their memory, which I feel will be in the form of a scholarship of some kind in their names.

I live in hope that one day soon we will engage our brothers in Papua New Guinea in a sincere, empathetic way. I look forward to the time when we acknowledge that we are brothers and remove the barriers that currently exist for Papua New Guinean citizens to work and live in Australia. I look forward to the welcome mat being extended to young Papua New Guinea people to come here as backpackers on temporary visas to do seasonal work. As one prominent PNG Minister told me recently, we currently treat them as lepers! This attitude has to change and it will only happen when we remove the barriers and extend a genuine hand to help them. In the meantime, the untimely deaths of two young people with so much potential and so much to offer will not be in vain. It will in fact act as a reminder that we have much to do, and we will do it in their memory. [Time expired.]

Kokoda Commemoration Day

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Hansard/Pages/HansardFull.aspx#/DateDisplay/HANSARD-1820781676-35559/HANSARD-1820781676-68352>

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN [6.50 p.m.]: Last week in Papua New Guinea, on the occasion of my forty-first crossing of the Kokoda Track, I was privileged to present the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, Sir Michael Somare, with a strategic plan for the proclamation of the Kokoda Trail as a national memorial park. The objective of the plan is to develop a sustainable eco-trekking industry for the Koiari and Orokaiva people who live along it. These people are custodians of land sacred to our Australian heritage and they will protect and care for the various battle sites if we provide them with an incentive to do so.

The plan came about when the former Minister for Veterans Affairs, Bruce Scott, advised me that the Government had no master plan for the development of the Kokoda Track. His successor, Danna Vale, advised me that if I were to devise such a plan she would present it to the Government for implementation. We then established a Kokoda Track Foundation, which raised the finances to

complete the plan. We worked in partnership with the Worldwide Fund for Nature, the University of Technology, Sydney and Templeton Galt.

We engaged Colonel David Knaggs to facilitate the process. That involved workshops in Sydney, Efogi Village, Kokoda Village and Port Moresby, and included Koiari and Orokaiva clan leaders and landowners, local, provincial and national government bodies, and other stakeholders such as the RSL, Rotary, the Kokoda Track Authority and the Papua New Guinea National Cultural Commission. Sir Michael was generous in his response to the plan and we hope to work in partnership with his Government in its implementation. We intend to present the plan to the current Minister for Veterans Affairs, the Hon. Bruce Billson, in Canberra on 15 June.

Kokoda, like Gallipoli, has had a slow awakening. While the story of Anzac was well known to all Australians as a result of our annual commemoration of Anzac Day, it was not until Peter Weir's epic film Gallipoli around 30 years ago that the peninsula developed into a pilgrimage for young Australians. This led to an increasing interest in other Australian battles on the Western Front, where our Anzacs, under the inspiring and visionary leadership of General Sir John Monash—arguably the greatest Australian of all time—were instrumental in the defeat of Germany. So it is with Kokoda.

Recent documentaries and books on the Kokoda campaign have led to an awakening of the importance of the battles along the track during the period from 8 August to 16 November 1942. This interest is also evident in the increasing number of Australians trekking across the track. Last month some 600 Australians aged between 10 and 70 trekked across it. The impact of the experience on those who trekked it is profound. They feel betrayed that they were never taught anything about it; They feel ashamed that we have ignored our Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels by never issuing them with a medal, and are disappointed at the neglect of significant battle sites.

Notwithstanding these disappointments, they feel proud that they have walked in the footsteps of the brave and have conquered some of their own adversities along the way. They also feel proud that they have shared the experience with their fellow Australians and have re-established a strong relationship with our PNG cousins. There is no doubt that Kokoda is stirring the emotions of our current generation, just as Gallipoli did to a previous generation.

Therefore I believe we should take the next step and consider the proclamation of a Kokoda Day of Commemoration on our national calendar. It should not be a holiday but a day when services are held in our schools and communities. I believe 3 November should be proclaimed as Kokoda Day. I acknowledge that the Kokoda campaign began with the first contact between 39 Militia Battalion and the Japanese forces forward of Kokoda on 8 August 1942 and ended with the crossing of the Kumusi River in pursuit of the retreating Japanese on 16 November 1942.

The battle across the track began with the Japanese attack on the Kokoda Plateau on 27 July 1942 and ended when the Australians re-entered Kokoda on 2 November and raised the Australian flag in the village on 3 November. I believe that the raising of the flag symbolised our victory against all the odds, a victory attributed to the success of our naval forces in the battles of the Coral Sea and Midway and our air force in its continual bombing sorties against Rabaul and Japanese naval and amphibious forces. Kokoda is symbolic of all these victories.

In 2002 I supported a proposal for a Battle of Australia Day and argued that Kokoda was too narrowly focused. Since then I have completed many more crossings of the track and have had access to much more research material, which has caused me to change the view I expressed at that time. Kokoda is the only time in our history where Australian territory was invaded by a fanatical and powerful enemy force. Our diggers were outnumbered, outgunned and out-trained but they contested every inch of the track back to the last line of defence, where they rallied and forced the invading Japanese forces back, and re-entered the village of Kokoda on 2 November. No Kiwis, British or Yanks were involved—it was purely an Australian operation.

Kokoda is symbolic of the fighting qualities evident among our soldiers, sailors, airmen and servicewomen in all of our campaigns in the south-west Pacific area. The anniversary of the raising of the Australian flag at Kokoda on 3 November 1942 would, I believe, be the most appropriate day to commemorate Kokoda Day. Therefore I call on the Federal Government to proclaim 3 November as Kokoda Day and include it as a national day of commemoration.

25 October 2007: Kokoda Trail World Heritage Listing

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Hansard/Pages/HansardResult.aspx#/docid/HANSARD-1820781676-38947/link/2117>

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN [5.59 p.m.]: Members will be aware of my long association with the Kokoda Trail in Papua New Guinea. Over the past 16 years I have trekked across the track on 48 occasions and have been able to identify a number of battle sites that had been bypassed and reclaimed by the jungle. During this time I have met with people from all walks of life in Papua New Guinea, including village clan leaders, landowners, businessmen, government members at all levels and even raskol gang leaders. Through these contacts I have become acquainted with many of the challenges they face on a day-to-day basis.

I have previously spoken in this House about what I regard as a widening empathic gap between our two countries. I believe there were two events that led to the widening of the gap. The first was the granting of independence to Papua New Guinea in 1975 when we stopped sending young patrol officers to Papua New Guinea and withdrew our provincial governors. The second was the opening of the University of Papua New Guinea which stopped the flow of Papua New Guinea students to Australia. The two events reduced our capacity to work with and understand each other. Unfortunately the vacuum was not filled with mutual exchange programs as aid money replaced people-to-people contacts.

The situation has deteriorated to the extent that the empathic gap between us is now as wide as it has ever been. Our aid policies have failed because we simply do not understand the Melanesian way. I do not believe that we ever will, but I do believe that we could do much better than now. We need more people-to-people contact with Papua New Guinea. We need innovative long-term exchange programs. We need to provide Papua New Guinea citizens with more access to our educational institutions and seasonal labour markets. But most of all I believe we need a dedicated Minister for Melanesia with a department dedicated to developing and implementing innovative people-to-people programs.

Let me return to the significance of Kokoda in our relationship. Yesterday's announcement by the Federal Minister for the Environment and Water Resources, Malcolm Turnbull, who committed a Coalition government to providing \$15.9 million to have the Kokoda Trail listed as a World Heritage site, is significant. I congratulate the Minister for the Environment and Water Resources on that initiative. I also congratulate the Premier, Morris Iemma, on his recent commitment of \$400,000 toward the construction of the Ralph Honner Education Centre at the Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway at Concord. The Premier has been an extremely strong supporter of the work that has been done at the centre.

Kokoda has a belated resonance with growing numbers of Australians who make the pilgrimage across it each year. But while it has great significance for us, it has even more significance in our relationship with our regional cousins in Papua New Guinea. The effort required to achieve World Heritage listing will be long term and it will be a complex and frustrating project. Despite that, we must persevere and ensure that we maintain a close partnership with our cousins in Papua New Guinea to make it happen. The potential to provide a model for the listing of significant sites in the South West Pacific area and Papua New Guinea will put the area on the map as a world-class ecotourism destination. It will give hope to countless thousands of Papua New Guineans who currently have no hope.

A successful model for ecotourism will provide Papua New Guinea clans with positive incentives to resist the exploitation of their land by destructive forestry and mining operations. I therefore urge the Federal Leader of the Opposition, Kevin Rudd, who I know has a good firsthand knowledge of the spirit of Kokoda as a result of his trekking across it last year, to match the Coalition Government's commitment to ensure that we use Kokoda in a bipartisan way to rebuild the empathic bridge between our two countries. Another important element in the significance of Kokoda is that with increasing numbers of people walking the trail, a positive history lesson which is almost a rite of passage is being afforded to young Australians to assist them in understanding their cultural heritage and the price that other people paid for the freedom, peace and prosperity that exists in Australia today. Sixty-five years ago Papua New Guineans gave us a hand in our hour of need. Now it is their hour of need. I urge the Government to commit to working in partnership with our cousins in Papua New Guinea.

Question—That this House do now adjourn—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

The House adjourned at 6.04 p.m. until Tuesday 6 November 2007 at 2.30 p.m.

31 August 2010: Tribute to PNG Kokoda Guides

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Hansard/Pages/HansardResult.aspx#/docid/HANSARD-1820781676-68179/link/2117>

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN [5.11 p.m.]: Each year for the past 18 or so years I have led treks across the Kokoda Trail in Papua New Guinea to assist in perpetuating what I call the spirit of Anzac. I have been evacuated from the trail twice over my 59 previous journeys, but in April this year, when I was about halfway across the trail, I contracted what appears to have been an acanthamoeba parasite in the eye. Within 24 hours I was totally blind in the right eye and about 12 hours later I was almost totally blind in the left eye. This made me totally dependent on a number of people.

Time does not allow me to thank everybody with whom I have been associated over the past four months. However, the care and compassion afforded me by my Papua New Guinean guides, whom I have known for many years and for whom I have great respect and empathy, gave me a good feeling for the care that their grandfathers gave our fathers during World War II. It was genuine commitment. They took me under their wing in the middle of the jungle. They built a stretcher for me, tied me to it with vine and, in a series of relays, carried me through the rugged Templeton's Crossing area and across Iora Creek, where we all nearly came to grief. However, at no stage did I feel unsafe because I could feel their strength, their compassion and their desire to get me out. My trek leader Joe, our medic Combi, a trekker Dr Leslie Glen and a great bunch of other trekkers were totally devoted to getting me out safely.

A helicopter took me to Port Moresby, where Dr Amyna Sultan, who is a consultant ophthalmologist at the Pacific International Hospital, was called in while off duty. By that stage I was in a very bad way, but I will never forget the professional devotion that I got from Dr Sultan that night. She prescribed drops every 30 minutes, knowing how serious things were. Because I could not get a bed in the hospital, my mate in Port Moresby, Warren Bartlett, had to administer the drops every 30 minutes until I was able to get on a plane the next day. I had to pretend that I could see and I did not need care, which was a difficult operation. I thank the Air Niugini hostesses who helped put the drops in my eyes.

I was then admitted to Sydney Eye Hospital under the care of Dr John Males and was prescribed a range of drugs because they were not able to positively identify the parasite. I think it was eight to ten

drops in each eye every 30 minutes for the next 48 hours. I was almost punch-drunk by the end of that 48-hour period. I had no sleep, I was disoriented and my eyes did not want to open for any more drops. There are a number of angels at Sydney Eye Hospital. I do not have their surnames—I had to ask them for their first names and could not write them down because I could not see for the first week. I would ask who was there as they changed shifts. There was Helen, Gemma, Ushma from Nepal, Ting-Ting from Hong Kong, Vonica from Hong Kong and David and Max—absolutely wonderful people. I was under the expert care of Dr Robert McDonald, Dr Matt Simunovic and Dr Jenny Tye, who is here from Thailand. With the caterers and cleaners, I was almost a resident. Each morning they would bring a packaged breakfast. I thought: A packaged breakfast to a blind man? I think I used my Swiss army knife more in four weeks in the Sydney Eye Hospital than I have used it in 10 years on the Kokoda Trail, but I managed to survive.

I got support from all members across the political spectrum and divide, my colleagues in the Liberal and The Nationals parties, all my friends in the Labor Party who came across to say hello, and the Greens. It was just wonderful and I do thank them. I received a wonderful basket of fruit, chocolates and biscuits from the Labor Caucus and I thought, "Crikey, this is great, they have no interest in my personal demise so I can hook into this without a taste tester." The food came in very handy. I still cannot drive and I still cannot see properly. My wonderful wife has turned nurse and occasionally matron, but being in a state of total dependency, as I have been for the past four months, makes one appreciate what a wonderful land we live in and what wonderful people we live amongst. It is a lesson that I will never forget and I thank everyone.

8 September 2011: Official Name: Kokoda Trail

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Hansard/Pages/HansardResult.aspx#/docid/HANSARD-1820781676-44785/link/2117>

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN (Parliamentary Secretary) [6.19 p.m.]: Since I first trekked across the Kokoda Trail 20 years ago, there has been much speculation about the official name of the native tracks that cross the Owen Stanley Ranges between Owers Corner and Kokoda in Papua New Guinea. While some veterans have used the term "Kokoda Track" since World War II, it became an issue of intense debate after former Prime Minister Paul Keating kissed the ground at Kokoda on the fiftieth anniversary of the campaign in April 1992. This was accompanied by much talkback noise about "trail" being an American term and "track" being the language of the Australian bush. This suited Keating's agenda for an Australian republic at the time. It also suited those in the Australian commentariat who harboured a strong anti--American bias. They have ensured that Kokoda Track has emerged as the more politically correct term.

The origin of the official name "Kokoda Trail" dates back to 1947 when an Australian Battles Nomenclature Committee was established to define the battles in the Pacific. Its final report in 1958 adopted Kokoda Trail as the official Commonwealth battle honour, which was awarded to 10 infantry battalions and the Pacific Islands Regiment. During its investigations it discovered that all the Australian Survey Corps maps printed in late 1942-43 named it the Kokoda Trail and that in 1932 the wife of a planter on the Sogeri Plateau had written a book about the mountain trail which she named The Kokoda Trail.

The Chief Minister of Papua New Guinea, Michael Somare, who was sworn into office on 23 June 1972, designated the name "Kokoda Trail" in Papua New Guinea's Government Gazette No. 88 of 12 October 1972 at page 1362, column 2, "Notice 1972/28 of the Papua New Guinea Place Names Committee". Today the official title "Kokoda Trail", as gazetted, is recognised by the national government of Papua New Guinea and the Returned Services League of Australia which is the national representative body for ex-service men and women. A recent motion requesting the national RSL to lobby the Australian Government to have the Kokoda Trail renamed the Kokoda Track was defeated at the RSL national congress held in Dubbo on 14 and 15 September 2010. The name

"Kokoda Trail" is also recognised by the Australian War Memorial, which is the custodian of our military heritage.

The Australian War Memorial adopted the name "Kokoda Trail" for its World War II galleries because of the official battle honours awarded in that name. That name is recognised by the official battle honours of all 10 Australian units who fought in the Kokoda campaign as well as the Pacific Islands. Stuart Hawthorne is the author of the most definitive history of the Kokoda Trail that was published in 2003 by the Central Queensland University Press, *The Kokoda Trail—A History*. Recently he wrote on the Australian War Memorial blog:

Exploration and development of the early parts of the overland route near Port Moresby began about 130 years ago. In this light, the campaign constitutes a very small part of the track's history (about a third of one percent) yet the importance ascribed to the WW2 period often assumes a considerably high significance. Of course the Kokoda campaign is very important in Australia on many levels but notwithstanding this, I often wonder whether the presumption that our Australian perspective displaces all others and borders on the arrogant.

Major General Kingsley Norris, Medical Director of the 7th Division during World War II traversed the Kokoda Trail more than any other person while setting up rest and dressing stations for the wounded. He wrote of it:

Time, rain and the jungle growth will eventually obliterate this native pad; but forever more will live the memory of weary men who have passed this way and ghosts of glorious men who have gone, gone far beyond the Kokoda Trail.

I accept that individuals of some units in Australia refer to it as the Kokoda Track. I am a board member of the Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway at Concord. I have no issue with references to the Kokoda Track in Australia because no-one could win an argument in Australia whether it should be "Track" or "Trail". However, in view of the impending seventieth anniversary of the War in the Pacific, I call on the Australian Government and government officials to respect the sovereign right of the independent nation of Papua New Guinea to name its own geographical features and to accept the combined wisdom of our wartime leaders by awarding battle honours in the name of the Kokoda Trail.

27 March 2012: Australia-Papua New Guinea Parliamentary Friendship Group
<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Hansard/Pages/HansardResult.aspx#/docid/HANSARD-1820781676-46718/link/2117>

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN (Parliamentary Secretary) [6.58 p.m.]: Tonight I had the pleasure of establishing the inaugural meeting of the Australia-Papua New Guinea Parliamentary Friendship Group. I am delighted to announce that I was elected as chair of that group.

The Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox: Unanimously?

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: It was unanimous. The Hon. Paul Green of the Christian Democrats was elected deputy chair and Mr David Elliott was elected as secretary. Papua New Guinea is our closest neighbour. It is a former mandated Territory, a fellow Commonwealth member and our wartime ally. Papua New Guinea is a nation of about 840 different languages and cultures. It is a country we know little about, yet we should know more. The purpose of the Australia-Papua New Guinea Parliamentary Friendship Group is to inform members of our friends in Papua New Guinea.

Since independence was forced upon Papua New Guinea in 1975 by the Whitlam Labor Government because of the strong anti-colonial sentiment that existed in the world at the time, our relationship has

drifted. Until then Papua New Guinea had a very good system of colonial government with young patrol officers, or Kiaps as they were called, working for provincial governors to patrol the area, to get to know the people, to register births and deaths, to dispense justice and to help the people to work their way out of a subsistence economy. The officers learned the language and the culture and many of them married Papua New Guinean women. Papua New Guineans came to Australia to study. Now that Papua New Guinea has its own university the students do not come here anymore and officials do not visit there as often, so there is a widening, empathic gap. I hope that the Australia-Papua New Guinea Parliamentary Friendship Group will take the first step towards closing the empathic gap that currently exists.

[Time for debate expired.]

Question—That this House do now adjourn—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

The House adjourned at 7.00 p.m. until Wednesday 28 March 2012 at 11.00 a.m.

25 October 2012: Kokoda Day

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Hansard/Pages/HansardResult.aspx#/docid/HANSARD-1820781676-49110/link/2117>

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN (Parliamentary Secretary) [3.35 p.m.]: On 3 November 1942 General "Bloody George" Vasey surveyed his diggers as they unfurled the Australian flag on the Kokoda plateau. They were tired, gaunt and dishevelled as the Ode was recited:

They went with songs to battle, they were young, straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow. They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted, they fell with their faces to the foe.

A solemn silence ensued before the flag was slowly raised from half-mast. Reveille sounded to herald an eternal dawn for 500 of their mates who lay in jungle graves along the notorious Kokoda Trail. Vasey's troops were still bristling at General Macarthur's claim that Australians would not fight. The odds were certainly stacked against them. On the home front armchair generals displayed an appalling ignorance of the conditions the diggers were fighting under, unions refused to load ships with vital supplies and there even was heated debate over a proposal to cancel the Melbourne Cup. The troops were in a devil's cauldron—a rugged and inhospitable jungle that many grew to fear more than the enemy. To their front was a disciplined, confident and fanatical enemy. General Vasey was put in charge of the campaign to energise the situation along the Kokoda Trail. Vasey was a soldier's general—charismatic, brave and resourceful. His life was to be cut short in a tragic plane crash on a flight to New Guinea before the war ended.

Vasey understood the significance of the ceremony. He knew that in the future this day would be commemorated with similar reverence to Anzac Day. He knew that the parade before him symbolised the turning of the tide in the war in the Pacific. Japanese victories in the Philippines, Burma, Malaya, Singapore, Indonesia and Rabaul created a fear of imminent invasion of the Australian mainland. Bombing raids over Darwin, Broome, Wyndham and Townsville, the sinking of ships off our east and west coasts, and the penetration of Sydney Harbour by mini submarines caused bomb shelters to be built in Melbourne. History records that the threat was averted after the great naval battles of the Coral Sea and Midway. Coastwatchers risked their lives to give early warning of Japanese attacks. Heroic fighter pilots created havoc with Japanese shipping and coastal emplacements. Commandos ambushed, harassed and destroyed vital installations, and local Papuan carriers created impossible supply lines across jungle-clad ranges.

No single action could stop the hitherto undefeated Japanese war machine, but the combined efforts of thousands of unsung heroes in the sky, on the sea, along the Kokoda Trail, at Milne Bay and at Guadalcanal caused the enemy to shelve their plans for invasion of the Australian mainland and concentrate their force in the Melanesian island chain to our immediate north. The raising of the Australian flag at Kokoda on 3 November 1942 symbolised the turning of the tide of the war in the Pacific. I hope that one day it will be proclaimed as an official day of commemoration.

As we now approach the seventieth anniversary of the ceremony I call on all schools in New South Wales to hold a commemorative service. I encourage them to draw on the Kokoda resource kit recently distributed to all secondary schools in Australia by the Department of Veterans Affairs. The resource kit includes a 12 unit teacher guidebook, a CD-ROM with supporting material, a documentary on the Kokoda campaign and two large posters with accompanying teaching activities on CD-ROM. The department also has a wealth of information on its website about how schools and communities can organise commemorative events. I commend the Department of Veterans Affairs and the NSW Board of Studies for their commitment to developing educational material on our war-time history, and I urge all schools to hold a commemorative service to acknowledge the significance of the day the Australian flag was raised at Kokoda.

7 May 2013: Kokoda Trail Heritage Protection

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Hansard/Pages/HansardResult.aspx#/docid/HANSARD-1820781676-50688/link/2117>

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN (Parliamentary Secretary) [6.55 p.m.]: I express my concern over the desecration of a significant wartime historical site along the Kokoda Trail by the Australian Government. The site I refer to is an abandoned mortar position adjacent to Lake Myola about halfway across the trail. I found the position approximately 10 years ago whilst I was investigating this particular area with a local landowner. It was off the side of a remote track that was used by local hunters. It was part of an ammunition storage system that supported the mortar baseplates out on the lakebed of what is called Little Myola. The mortars would have been positioned to support the Australian hospital and logistic support bases on Big Myola.

The position comprised a large ammunition storage pit and a large quantity of live two and three inch mortars, M36 grenades, clips of .303 ammunition, detonators and fuses. Lying around the area were rotted army boots and a couple of rusted shovels. The ammunition was stacked in rows beside the pit and covered in moss that had gathered over the past 60 years. This gave the position a haunting appearance in what is known as the moss forest. I reported the discovery to the Papua New Guinea Kokoda Track Authority but at that stage it was operated by an expatriate manager and a part-time secretary and there was little interest in the preservation of historically significant sites along the Kokoda Trail.

It was not until a public outcry over the threat to mine a large part of the trail in 2006 that the Australian Government finally took more than a token interest in the area. Unfortunately, the Howard Government miscalculated and allocated responsibility for the preservation of the Kokoda Trail to the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, most probably because the Heritage Division was responsible for the List of Overseas Places of Historic Significance to Australia. The status of heritage has since been dropped from what is now the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. Arts has recently been added to the Minister's responsibilities but does not yet rate a mention in its acronym.

Since 2008 Kokoda has been used as a subterfuge for the department to pursue an environmental agenda in Papua New Guinea. Its guise was to embed staff in the Papua New Guinea Department of Environment and Conservation to assist Papua New Guinea in developing a case for a World Heritage listing for the Owen Stanley Ranges, which includes the Kokoda Trail. A joint agreement with an

emphasis on global warming was signed with great fanfare. Terms relating to military heritage did not rate a mention. One can only speculate how "joint" the agreement was in the framing process. Highly paid Canberra envirocrats with tax-free salaries and generous allowances were dispatched to advise and assist the Papua New Guinea Government to save the Kokoda Trail. For most of those involved, it was their first trip to Papua New Guinea and the trail quickly became a lucrative honey pot for a coterie of anointed consultants who came, saw, held talkfests, produced five-point plans and left with a wallet full of booty.

The results speak for themselves. When the envirocrats arrived in 2008, 5,621 Australians had trekked Kokoda. After three years of assistance resulting in a ten-fold increase in staff, a conga line of consultants and more than \$20 million of taxpayers' money, the numbers have decreased by almost half to 2,914. Projects initiated without any reference to Papua New Guinea authorities or the trekking industry included the construction of massage parlours, a failed \$3 million Village Livelihood Project and a dysfunctional management structure. The Australian managers and staff engaged during the period 2008 to 2012 have left the Papua New Guinea Kokoda Track Authority without any management protocols. There is no master plan to protect and develop sites of military historical significance, there is no legislation to support their authority, there is no campsite booking system, there is no credible trek operator licensing system, and there is not a single sustainable outcome from their ill-conceived Village Livelihood program.

The only winners thus far are those who received generous tax-free salaries and even more generous overseas living allowances, the consultants they engaged to solve problems they did not understand and a bevy of aid-funded non-government organisations who continue to reinforce local beliefs in cargo cults. The wartime historical integrity of the Kokoda Trail is now facing the same level of threat as that posed by the establishment of a goldmine in 2006. The integrity of the mortar position at Lake Myola has been destroyed forever by the senseless decision to build a steel-wire cage and lock all of the ammunition in it. Trekkers now have no need to visit the site and the local custodians have been denied the opportunity to earn a respectable income from it.

I have always argued that the Kokoda Trail should be developed as a model for a wartime tourism industry in Papua New Guinea because the local people are the custodians of battle sites sacred to our military heritage. Unfortunately, our attempt to assist Papua New Guinea in this regard since 2008 has been an unmitigated failure. I am happy to debate this statement with anybody in any forum. I believe that responsibility for the protection and development of the wartime heritage of the Kokoda Trail should be transferred to the Department of Veterans' Affairs at the earliest opportunity. We need to start again with a management plan that acknowledges Kokoda as a wartime pilgrimage for most Australians and not an environmental levitation for eco-trekkers or a bottomless pit of booty for aid-funded consultants and non-government organisations.

Question—That this House do now adjourn—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

The House adjourned at 7.00 p.m. until Wednesday 8 May 2013 at 11.00 a.m.

11 September 2013: PNG Pilgrimage Tourism Potential

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Hansard/Pages/HansardResult.aspx#/docid/HANSARD-1820781676-52001/link/2117>

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN (Parliamentary Secretary) [6.12 p.m.]: Papua New Guinea is a repository of our wartime history in the Pacific. Over the past 70 years, sites sacred to our wartime heritage have been reclaimed by the jungle. However, in recent times there has been a resurgence of interest in our military history, as is evidenced by the increasing numbers of young Australians going to Gallipoli

each year, increasing numbers trekking across the Kokoda Trail, increasing numbers visiting Long Tan in Vietnam, and so on. Next year we begin the commemoration of the centenary of Anzac. For the following four years there will be a lot of emphasis on and interest in our military history.

Yesterday in Papua New Guinea, at a place called the Black Cat Track, a group of Australians were attacked by some Papua New Guineans. As a result, tragically, two of their Papua New Guinea guides were killed and I understand one or two Australians were wounded. I do not have all the details of what happened, but what I do know is that this is an outcome of our neglect of our wartime heritage in Papua New Guinea. When we first started going to Papua New Guinea more than 20 years ago, we negotiated with the local landowners because they are the custodians of the land that is sacred to our wartime heritage. We found that we had to work with those landowners to ensure that they got an economic benefit from Australians going there. I strongly believe that the Australian Government has a responsibility to ensure that Australians who go to Papua New Guinea can do so safely. Thus far, although we have spent some \$20 million since 2008, the Australian Government has failed in this regard.

Papua New Guineans must understand that there is an economic benefit to be derived from our visits to sites on their land. To do that, we have to build the infrastructure required; we have to build the interpretative memorials so that young Australians can visit the sites and understand their significance. They can pay a fee, employ people to look after them, hire camp sites and so forth, and in that way provide a benefit. We have neglected our responsibility in this regard. On the contrary, after the threat to mine the Kokoda Trail in 2006, responsibility for the Kokoda Trail was delegated to the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and Arts. With all due respect to that department, its objective became to assist Papua New Guineans to develop a case for World Heritage listing. The military heritage of the Kokoda Trail has been sidelined, pioneering trek operators who established the industry were sidelined, and so were the local landowners.

Over the past couple of years Kokoda has become a lucrative honeypot for a conga line of consultants from Canberra who are being sent to Papua New Guinea to do studies of problems that they have absolutely no idea about. They produce 5-point plans and 10-point plans, leave them behind and come back with a wallet full of booty. It is called boomerang aid. Papua New Guineans do not like it: Australian consultants are making a fortune out of it. The latest project is a village livelihood project. They put goats, ducks, chooks and vegetables into villages there, but they did not consult the locals or the trek operators. As a result the goats got into and ate the gardens owned by the locals—so they ate the goats, ducks and chooks.

We have spent \$3 million, but there has not been a single good outcome from that. We must use the tragic example of yesterday to check and make sure that Australians who go to Papua New Guinea are safe. The new Australian Government has to look at this matter. It must work in partnership with the Papua New Guinea Government and with the local landowners to transfer ownership of that responsibility to them. We must prove to them that they can get an economic benefit, protect our wartime heritage on the Kokoda Trail and reward the custodians of that land for the protection they give to the track.

Question—That this House do now adjourn—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

The House adjourned at 6.17 p.m. until Thursday 12 September 2013 at 9.30 a.m.

18 September 2013: Canberra Hijack of Kokoda Tourism
<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Hansard/Pages/HansardResult.aspx#/docid/HANSARD-1820781676-52157/link/2117>

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN (Parliamentary Secretary) [6.50 p.m.]: The recent attack on a group of Australians near the Black Cat Track in Papua New Guinea was reported around the world. Two Papua New Guinea guides were killed in the attack and another died of his wounds a few days later. The Black Cat Track is one of a number of wartime tourism pilgrimages undertaken each year in Papua New Guinea by an increasing number of Australians. Whilst the negative publicity resulting from the attack will have a detrimental impact on the potential for a wartime tourism industry in Papua New Guinea, hopefully it will cause the Australian and Papua New Guinea governments to review the management systems required to ensure people can safely visit battle sites and campaign areas relevant to our wartime history. The record of Australia's involvement in the Papua New Guinea Kokoda Track Authority since the threat in 2006 to mine a large section of the Kokoda Trail indicates that we have much to learn about working with our friends in Papua New Guinea.

Prior to this time the emerging trekking industry was managed by an expatriate Australian, Mr Warren Bartlett, on a Papua New Guinea salary of \$12,500 per year. He had one part-time staff assistant. Mr Bartlett had worked in Papua New Guinea as a patrol officer prior to independence in 1975 and has continued to work in the country since then. He is fluent in Tok Pisin and has a great appreciation of the challenges of working within local environments. He had been engaged by my trekking company, Adventure Kokoda, to organise our in-country administration and logistics for some years before he was engaged to work with the Papua New Guinea Kokoda Track Authority. At that time neither the Australian nor Papua New Guinea governments provided any assistance to manage the emerging Kokoda trekking industry. In 2008 Mr Bartlett initiated an audit of trek permits in Efogi village, which is about half-way along the trail. His audit revealed that one Australian trek operator had smuggled more than 300 trekkers across the trail and many others had failed to pay for the permits they had received.

At this stage a transition was in place as the Australian Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts assumed responsibility for providing a proper management system for the trekking industry. It was assumed that it would establish the necessary systems and then train its Papua New Guinea counterparts so they could assume responsibility for the management authority. Trek operators were desperate for a proper management system because of the chaos on the trail caused by a dysfunctional board of directors and a record number of trekkers. The Australian Government appointed Rod Hillman as chief executive officer of the Kokoda Track Authority. Unfortunately, one of his first actions was to negotiate a series of secret deals with rogue trek operators that provided them with a financial advantage over those who had paid their trek fees in full and in advance. This practice would have been referred to a corruption agency in Australia, but in Papua New Guinea it was evident that the fox had now been put in charge of the henhouse. Local villagers were shamelessly deprived of their full entitlement of shared benefits as a result of these secret negotiations.

Hillman then closed the books of the Kokoda Track Authority and refused to publish any further annual trek operator statistics. Thus, rogue trek operators were given carte blanche as he failed to conduct any further audits. During Rod Hillman's tenure former Kokoda Track Authority board members who embezzled more than \$100,000 from the authority were not prosecuted and rogue trek operators who owed up to \$50,000 in unpaid trek fees were allowed to continue to operate. Hillman dealt with compliant trek operators and isolated those who called for proper management protocols. Local landowners along the Kokoda Trail also were isolated and left to their own resources. The only growth industry during Rod Hillman's tenure was Australian consultancies. Trek operators with up to 30 years experience in Papua New Guinea were isolated from the tender processes, which operated as a closed shop. Some operators had been associated with Rod Hillman prior to his arrival in Papua New Guinea.

Consultants reports were kept secret from both trek operators and local landowners, and projects were initiated without any local consultation; there is no evidence of any of them succeeding. When the Australian Government imposed its envirocrats on the Papua New Guinea Kokoda Track Authority in

2008 there were 5,621 trekkers. Despite a ten-fold increase in staff and a multimillion-dollar budget, trekker numbers declined to 2,914 at the end of Rod Hillman's tenure in 2011. Of more concern is the fact that there is no legislation to support the local management authority; no campsite booking system; no protection for the welfare of local guides, carriers and campsite owners; no plan for the protection of historical campaign sites; no integrity in the licensing system for trek operators; and no dispute resolution system for aggrieved landowners. As a matter of fact, not a single management protocol is in place for the Kokoda trekking industry.

Effectively, Kokoda has been hijacked by Canberra-based envirocrats. Rather than develop the trail as a model for wartime tourism in Papua New Guinea, it has become a lucrative honey pot for Australian consultants and bureaucrats assigned to aid agencies. In view of the attack on the Black Cat Track, I believe it is timely to re-examine our approach to protecting our wartime heritage in Papua New Guinea and to have a common system for engaging with the custodians of significant battle sites and campaign areas to ensure they receive an economic benefit from the industry. We also must ensure the safety of Australian pilgrims to these sites. The Australian Government has a duty of care to ensure this happens.

Question—That this House do now adjourn—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

The House adjourned at 6.55 p.m. until Thursday 19 September 2013 at 9.30 a.m.

[19 November 2013: Tribute to Ovoru Indiki: Fuzzy Wuzzy Angel](https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Hansard/Pages/HansardResult.aspx#/docid/HANSARD-1820781676-53048/link/2117)
<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Hansard/Pages/HansardResult.aspx#/docid/HANSARD-1820781676-53048/link/2117>

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN (Parliamentary Secretary) [11.54 p.m.]: Tonight in the New South Wales Parliament I pay tribute to Mr Ovoru Indiki, who passed away peacefully in the village of Naduri near the Kokoda Trail on 15 November. Ovoru was a respected chief of Naduri village, which is about halfway along the Kokoda Trail. I believe he would have been in his early sixties when I first met him in 1991, however it is difficult to substantiate his exact age because of the lack of records in Papua New Guinea at the time of his birth. He would, therefore, have been in his late eighties or early nineties when he died. Ovoru was a teenager when war came to Papua New Guinea with the bombing of Port Moresby in 1942. Like many Papuans at the time he did not understand what was happening and he fled back to the safety of his village high in the jungle-clad Owen Stanley Ranges. It was a long trek and he recalled to me that he was very frightened at the time.

When the war came to the Owen Stanley Ranges he was indentured by the Australian administration to help carry supplies forward to the Australian troops fighting on the Kokoda Trail. On the return journey Ovoru and his fellow Papuans often came across wounded Australian soldiers who could struggle no further—many of them lying face down in the mud. Ovoru and his friends would always stop, build a stretcher out of bush material and carry the wounded digger back to the medics at Ower's Corner. It was a slow and tortuous journey that took up to three weeks over some of the most inhospitable terrain on the planet. During these journeys they shared their meagre rations of rice with the stranger and slept either side of him at night to keep him warm. Hundreds of our diggers survived as a direct result of their support and sacrifice. They were immortalised in the poem Fuzzy-Wuzzy Angels composed by Sapper Bert Beros whilst recuperating in the Sogeri field hospital "at the bottom of the track".

After the war Ovoru was appointed village constable at Naduri under Australia's colonial regime. In 1975 Papua New Guinea achieved independence from Australia and Ovoru Indiki was awarded an Independence Medal for services to his village. To our great shame Ovoru, along with approximately

56,000 wartime carriers indentured to support the Australian war effort in Papua New Guinea from 1942 to 1945, have never been formally recognised by the Australian Government. We were hopeful that this wrong might have been rectified in 2010, but Ovoru and his people were shamelessly conned by a slick public relations stunt perpetrated by the Australian Government. A select few were issued with a medallion to provide a few photo opportunities designed to placate those agitating for official recognition of their service. When the medal was first announced we were duped into believing their service as wartime carriers had finally been recognised. It took some time before we were able to examine the small print and realise it was not a medal with any official status; it was a medallion with no status. For those who are not clear about the difference I should explain that a medal is something earned and awarded under our official honours and awards system. A medallion is something which is distributed in a Wheaties packet as a promotional gimmick and which does not have any official status.

Notwithstanding this shameful con, Ovoru Indiki's presence in his native village of Naduri symbolised the service and sacrifice of his Koiari and Orokaiva villagers to the thousands of trekkers who had the good fortune to meet him and thank him. Ovoru always had the presence of a chief. I recall when we brought him to Sydney and pushed him around the city in a wheelchair that every now and then he would beckon us to stop and he would stare at a building, a bus or a ferry at Circular Quay, the Harbour Bridge or the Sydney Opera House. I wondered how he was processing the wonders of a modern and bustling city. That night he told me, through his son, Andy, that his grandfather had told him that somewhere in the world there must be a great city and he hoped that one day Ovoru would get to see it. He smiled when he said, "Now I am here." He also told me that when he went back to his village he would tell the kids that if they worked hard at school some day they might get to come to Sydney. My meetings with Ovoru over the years, and the awe and respect accorded to him by visiting trekkers, have certainly helped me keep things in perspective.

Ovoru is survived by six sons, Nelson, Mark, Jeffery, Ade, Andy and Gilbert, two daughters, Beatrice and Maliyn, 22 grandchildren and 12 great grandchildren. The world is a little poorer for his passing but Ovoru Indiki can now rest in peace knowing that his service and sacrifice, and that of his Koiari and Orokaiva people, will never be forgotten. I pledge that we will continue to seek official recognition of the Papuan wartime carriers who helped us so selflessly in our darkest hour of need. I hope that one day in remote villages most Australians will never see a shining silver medal with a ribbon in combined Australian and Papua New Guinea national colours will take pride of place in a traditional hut once inhabited by a wartime carrier. It is the least we can do to honour Ovoru's legacy and that of his people.

Question—That this House do now adjourn—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

The House adjourned at 11.59 p.m. until Wednesday 20 November 2013 at 10.00 a.m.

6 November 2014: Kokoda Trail Heritage Protection

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Hansard/Pages/HansardResult.aspx#/docid/HANSARD-1820781676-55964/link/2117>

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN (Parliamentary Secretary) [3.50 p.m.]: Gallipoli is the most sacred symbol of our Anzac heritage from the Great War. Kokoda is our most sacred symbol of our Anzac heritage from the war in the Pacific. Gallipoli is managed and maintained by the Office of Australian War Graves within the Federal Department of Veterans Affairs and is responsible for "building and maintaining national memorials overseas". Inherent in its role is the responsibility for our military heritage, as evidenced by the allocation of \$10 million from the Federal Government to develop an Australian Remembrance Trail in France and Belgium as a Centenary of Anzac project in order to

help Australians, and other visitors to the Western Front, learn about the Australian experience of war. It will be our World War I commemorative trail for future generations. Responsibility for our World War II commemorative trail, the Kokoda Trail, has been delegated to the Federal Department of Environment, which is responsible for our heritage, defined as:

All the things that make up Australia's identity—our spirit and ingenuity, our historic buildings, and our unique, living landscapes. Our heritage is a legacy from our past, a living, integral part of life today, and the stories and places we pass on to future generations.

Our Anzac heritage has obviously been absorbed into the definition, even though the department does not have the expertise to protect and perpetuate this important part of our military history. The Department of Veterans Affairs will undoubtedly acquire a great deal of expertise in the interpretation and development of the Remembrance Trail in France and Belgium for the Centenary of Anzac. It would seem logical for this corporate knowledge to be seamlessly transferred to the protection of the wartime integrity of our World War II interpretive trail between Owers Corner and Kokoda in Papua New Guinea in time for the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Kokoda campaign in 2017. Unfortunately this will not happen due to a bizarre Federal Government decision in 2007 to allocate responsibility for the protection of our wartime integrity on the Kokoda Trail to the Department of Environment.

The Department of Environment, Water, Heritage, and the Arts, as it was then known, set out to use the Kokoda Trail as a gateway to assisting the Papua New Guinea Government to develop a case for a World Heritage listing of the Owen Stanley Ranges, based on its environmental values. A joint agreement, with an emphasis on global warming and climate change speak, was signed with great fanfare but terms relating to the protection of our wartime military heritage did not rate a mention. I will leave it to others to speculate how "joint" the agreement was in the framing process.

Highly paid Canberra envirocrats, with tax-free salaries and generous allowances, were dispatched to assist Papua New Guinea to "save" the Kokoda Trail. It was the first trip to Papua New Guinea for most of those involved and the trail quickly became a lucrative honeypot for a coterie of anointed consultants who came, saw, held talkfests and produced five-point action plans to address issues they will never understand. The results speak for themselves. When the Canberra envirocrats arrived in 2008, 5,600 Australians trekked Kokoda. After three years of "assistance", which led to a tenfold increase in staff, a conga line of consultants and more than \$20 million of taxpayers' money, the numbers have decreased by 40 per cent. During this time they initiated projects without any reference to relevant Papua New Guinea authorities or the trekking industry. These included the construction of a massage parlour on a historic battle site, a \$3 million Village Livelihood Project that has not generated a single cent, and a dysfunctional management structure.

Hewitt-Pender and Associates has developed significant interpretive memorials for the Australian Government at Sandakan, Hellfire Pass and Isurava. It was given just four days notice to submit a tender for the development of a master plan for the Kokoda Trail by the Department of the Environment. Its tender was rejected because of its emphasis on the military heritage of the Kokoda campaign. The envirocrats within the department are obviously unaware of the fact that Australians do not elect to trek the Kokoda Trail to have an environmental levitation or a cultural awakening. That comes later, as a result of their experience. Most come to walk in the footsteps of the brave and to learn about the Kokoda campaign. Most leave with a better understanding of themselves and with knowledge of the humbling hospitality of their hosts in local villages and of the spectacular beauty of their pristine environment. Trekkers leave also with a profound respect for the sacrifice made by all who served in the Kokoda campaign. The deeds and sacrifices of those soldiers become embedded in their consciousness as a reference point for the rest of their lives.

We are the link generation between those who served and paid the supreme sacrifice and those who hopefully will never have to put their lives on the line in defence of freedom on such a scale as our veterans did 70 years ago. We have a duty of care to current and future generations to ensure sites sacred to our wartime heritage in Papua New Guinea are identified, interpreted, protected and

perpetuated. Responsibility for the protection of our military heritage clearly rests with the Department of Veterans Affairs. Other departments, such as Foreign Affairs, Defence, Education, and Environment, together with the Returned Services League of Australia, have important contributions to make but the lead agency for this important national responsibility rests with the Office of Australian War Graves. I urge the Australian Government to transfer responsibility for the protection of the wartime integrity of the Kokoda Trail and other significant sites in Papua New Guinea to the Department of Veterans Affairs.