

# Readers' comments in response to the Weekend Australian feature article: 'Kokoda Track failures labelled a disgrace as 'woke agenda' blamed for shortcomings'

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### Re: Aus AID

#### Robert Tulip

I worked in the AusAID PNG aid program until 2007, including providing support to the International Finance Corporation in its tourism program in PNG, which had a Kokoda focus led by John Perrottet. Charlie Lynn was a great advocate then. Supporting PNG tourism was not a focus of Australia's aid program, which was far more focused on government than on the private sector. The Prime Minister's Department had to encourage AusAID to take this on. Given the culture within AusAID, continuing in DFAT, it does not surprise me at all to see gender and climate given priority over military history. As Charlie explains, this undermines one of the main reasons why Australians want to walk the track, to honour the sacrifice of our forebears in World War Two. Kokoda tourism builds and maintains essential personal contact between Australia and PNG.

#### Terrence

So true Mr. Lynn. Recently I sat at a dinner table with a first assistant secretary in Foreign Affairs who advised her meeting the next day was to discuss the wording of missives to beneficiaries of our largesse in other countries directing them to speak about gender in their countries - sick stuff. Meanwhile the selling off our 'defence' real estate icons is just another example of the mindless destruction of our history and burying it, hence burying our historical culture as well ( good bye Kokoda - a track my father walked during the war).

#### Bruce

Not just the Kokoda Trail, the whole Australian aid programme (AUSAID and Australian Volunteers NGOs) seems to be focused on so called gender, climate issues etc and so much less on the aid recipients basic needs such as water, sanitation, transport and the like which will greatly improve their lives, rather than an agenda that is more for satisfying the needs of the donors than the receivers.

#### John

DEFAT has been doing the same right across the South Pacific for over a decade. Telling women how they should run their lives & so on. This shows no respect for these people's culture. Meanwhile, the Chinese are upgrading roads, airfields, sea ports, hydro schemes & so on - even building parliaments - many under foreign aid programs, including Chinese and also those funded by Australia & NZ, with convict labour on some. When will we wake up to ourselves?.

**KH**

@QLA: Surely the social issues/ violence of PNG and maintaining the Kokoda Track to enhance the revenue and lives of locals in PNG are NOT mutually exclusive. In my view, it would be far better to maintain and enhance the Track, encourage more tourism and revenue and through a 'softer' approach educate regarding violence. Creating a situation where there is less revenue will only increase tensions and lead to more violence. Maintaining the Track will also encourage more Australians to walk it and gain more insight into the incredible courage of the people of PNG and the Australians who, against incredible odds, defeated the Japanese (1st to do so) and saved our country from a land attack. At the time, they were our last hope!

**JAM**

All between 1943-1945 when my father fought "in the islands", I am not sure he had gender diversity, gender transition and identity issues on his mind. But DFAT and the Government would know better, and be aware of the dangers of anachronisms in history narratives too.

**Michael**

DFAT out - only support the government should be providing, in this space, is financial. Accredited veteran organisations should be managing along with local tribes.

**The Great Unwashed**

Since PNG's independence in 1975, we have given them approximately \$20B in aid, including over \$600m last year alone. As a result, IMO, we have stripped them of any initiative. And replaced it with dependency.. They are a wonderful people with poor governance.... Sound familiar..??

**Marvin**

Patronising and paternalistic interference from Australian bureaucrats. How is it that they ignore the egregious gender issues among aboriginals here yet think it OK to interfere in another country?

**SandC**

The government and its acolytes, focusing on woke and climate, are therefore destroying what's been happening for decades. That is maintaining viable livelihoods and activities for the locals and providing opportunities for them to work with the visiting trekkers. Isn't that the main problem here, not because the diggers just want to keep going back...

**Re: Villagers**

**Rod**

I suspect that PNG villagers have a far better grip on what gender is than many modern Australians who have effectively invented a multitude of gender identities for no other reason than because they can. People need to be better employed.

**Philip**

Bravo to PNG for upholding Christianity against pagan woke Australian bureaucracies. They deserve as much as we can give for their help to our soldiers against a superior technological foe. It breaks the heart that we have neglected our dues to our fighters and their allies.

**Noel W**

"He (Mr Lynn, a former NSW Liberal MP) said the diplomatic emphasis on gender was irrelevant at Kokoda because of the ordered religious lives of the villagers. "There is no need for us to impose our social values on them. They have got it worked out," he said. Yet we in fact did impose our social values on them, since "...many of whom are practising and disciplined Seventh Day Adventists who he

said did not need to be lectured on issues such as gender." Hmmm...

**Charlie**

@Noel W, I had an issue with that for many years, but the more I learned about PNG and the simple needs of remote subsistence villagers, the more I came to appreciate the values the Seventh-day Adventists brought to them. Alcohol and drugs are not permitted, and so domestic violence is not an issue. They provide quality schools. A university, medical centres and a hospital. And more importantly, they give them hope. Their villages are spotless, and they have pride and dignity. So I'm much more relaxed with the values they have introduced than I was before I got to understand their situation

**Re: Australia's Woke Agenda**

**Cameron**

John, thank you for raising this as an issue. I would never have realised that the current Australian government's woke agenda extended beyond Australia. We owe the PNG people/villages along the Kokoda trail a perpetual legacy based on their beliefs and cultures, not one that is based on appeasing a very small minority here in Australia.

**Rod**

For goodness sake! This is an incredibly important part of our history, and those who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country right on our northern doorstep deserve much, much more than modern-day "woke intervention" to their memory. Get the leftie Canberra bureaucracy ideology right out of running Kokoda funding and give authority to someone who is passionate about, and has pride, knowledge and a genuine desire to preserve and respect this important "Shrine" to our nation for generations to come. Surely we are better than this.

**Ran**

The US just announced that it is breaking ties with Harvard because of Woke

**RUSSELL**

Given enough time, the woke version of history and literature will attempt to rewrite everything they can. Just as dangerous are the so-called 'progressives' in so many areas of our daily life.

**William**

Oh, woke, the new religion. Nothing else matters, apparently, woke is up the top of Maslow's pyramid, they say. Actually, the whole woke approach is the last thing that PNG needs. It is hard enough to get things done there, let alone with woke, climate change, and DEI agendas driven by DFAT, complicating everything. Grow up, DFAT and relevant others. It's not a game; many people will die because of your political correctness and wokeism.

**Who Are The Brain Police**

"Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past"  
- George Orwell, 1984

**James**

The usual BS from Canberra: they wrap themselves in the flag( although decreasingly so) on Anzac & Remembrance Days, but when it comes to a choice between funding the woke agenda or permanent ways of remembering the sacrifices made, they always choose the softer option. It isn't random, nor accidental, it's deliberate, entrenched, forceful, and unfortunately will be the end of the Australia that earned its place in the world.

**Paul K**

My Father patrolled the Southern coast of New Guinea in 1944-45 with not a thought about protecting "Woke ideology" 22 years later, I did not go to Vietnam with "Woke ideology" front and centre.

**Rejeitado**

Apparently, we are, via aid programs, pushing this same Woke gender ideology in East Timor as well. In that 98% catholic country, it's going down like a lead balloon. Meanwhile Chinese aid is building them roads, schools and ports. Labor's wasteful incompetence knows no bounds.

**Wendy D**

A climate crisis won't bring about the collapse of the Australia we have known and loved. It will be the dead weight of the woke, now weaselling its way into distorting every aspect of our national history and identity, even as far as the rough terrain of the Kokoda Track, where ordinary Aussies just want to honour the memory of our heroic soldiers who fought and died there. It makes me cry.

**Vote No**

If you were one of the many PNG helpers on the track during the Kokoda campaign, they wouldn't have been asking wounded soldiers their preferred gender. Bureaucracy is evil in many ways, trying to push unedifying nonsense as truth.

**Mark 63A**

@L&P-B The PNG I have the privilege to fly over and meet the real people on the ground is not reflected by the MSM. The woke who want to impose their skewered west opinions on PNG should perhaps reflect on the awaking of us plebs who have had enough of their sanctimonious BS.

**John**

What cultural arrogance preached and practised by DFAT! A review of their budget priorities supports my assertion.

**Rick**

The woke are modern-day missionaries, and they are far more destructive.

**Michael**

History to the modern woke crowd is a foreign land and cannot be trusted. The woke are all about rewriting history, not commemorating it. To impose woke gender politics is just another form of colonialism where the White guy knows best.

**SandC**

The government and its acolytes, focusing on woke and climate, are therefore destroying what's been happening for decades. That is maintaining viable livelihoods and activities for the locals and providing opportunities for them to work with the visiting trekkers. Isn't that the main problem here, not because the diggers just want to keep going back...

**Peter**

Woke is dead, just don't expect it! Under a far-left socialist woke labour government, the task will be harder, though.

**Drongo**

Wokeness and incompetence are synonymous

**Doc Torg**

As usual, nothing is "sacred". Bloody bureaucrats. Never walked it, I'll bet.

**Sounds Fishy**

Both gender & climate are important, but you have to get it right & wasting money is not smart. History is about respect but its now & the future that counts. Following any form of extremism when it's the rank & file who fill the majority of the issues with practical reality is what's important. Far too many people even politicians are pushing their own little agendas who are mainly very much in the minority & let's move on.

**Phillip of Melbourne**

Wow. I didn't think it could get any worse. Seriously; who are these wokesters who are lecturing png people about gender identity? Sack them all.

**D**

It is time for ordinary Australians to stand up. The Activist class has taken over much of Australia. Whether intentional or not, it follows Marxist theory. It is destroying Australia. Why this is happening I do not know. But I do know if we do nothing Australia will be destroyed.

**The Pig of Steel**

These woke zealots are forcing their values onto the locals. Quite imperialist don't you think? Colonialists even.

**Grantley**

Likewise. It seems to have been pillaged by woke social technicians.

**Katherine**

Australia goes woke, and PNG locals go broke! Now that will help PNG women and girls!

**Re: Military Heritage****Raymond**

As one whose father volunteered to serve in WW2 and was injured on the Kokoda trail, having served in Milne Bay, I don't take kindly to those who ignore that part of our history, and who claim that social justice/climate/woke should override any acknowledgement of our past.

**Helen**

@Raymond My father, too, Raymond.

**Matt**

My grandfather would be rolling in his grave, trying to comprehend what has become of the nation he fought for...

**Grantley**

Rampant pacifism denying our nation and PNG our military and civilian heroes a place in the Sun, which they should have. "A nation," as Churchill said, "without a history, has no future" And the meagre size and combat potential of our army tends to suggest the truth of that, that we have no future.

**Mark 63A**

@L&P-B The PNG I have the privilege to fly over and meet the real people on the ground is not reflected by the MSM. The woke who want to impose their skewered west opinions on PNG should perhaps reflect on the awaking of us plebs who have had enough of their sanctimonious BS.

**Re: The Kokoda Track Foundation****KeithTab**

I'll make sure that i avoid making donations to the Kokoda Track Foundation. I respect the past not the new agenda. Next time I go to Hellfire Pass in Kanchanaburi I'll double my donation there. Interestingly, there is a nearby Thai property owner on the Kwai Noi River who has dedicated a portion of his land in memory of Weary Dunlop. Great information (as at Hellfire Pass) and significant pathos. KJ

**Terry**

Send the Australian-based Kokoda Track Foundation packing, err, backpacking the Kokoda Track to learn it's not about the Kokoda Track Foundation.

**Robert.e.**

The Kokoda Track Foundation might as well attempt to bring true democracy to many of the countries the US has tried to convert in the past. Good luck to its misguided efforts.

**GEOFFREY**

When you see who's running the Kokoda Track Foundation, it explains the woke stupidity

**Re: Trekking**

I walked Kokoda 40 years ago. I did it because I was interested in the history of the track, such as Imita Ridge being the last point of Australian retreat, and so on. Woke ideologues must be removed from any role. As Charlie Lynn says, they are irrelevant (and undesirable)

**Sandy**

Charlie has long been fighting this battle to acknowledge our veterans, the incredible campaign that they waged and won and our military history in PNG. The failure of successive Governments to promote this heritage, the abhorrent wastage of money on making no improvement to the trail, and the failure to promote this unbelievable campaign where Australians repulsed a ferocious enemy can only be described as abhorrent. This history of waste and inaction is a repudiation of what the Kokoda Campaign was all about.

**Peter**

Having walked with Charlie & his offsider Chad Sherrin, I completely agree with Lynn's article. I have endeavoured to find a tour organisation to visit the northern beaches of New Guinea to visit battle sites( Buna Gona Sandican ect, sites where hundreds of Australian soldiers were killed & wounded there are none available. At Popondetta a lone Australian businessman there Dale Price has single handed help rescue and relocate plaques put by units at various battle sites to a central memorial park at Popandetta. He maintains them with little of no help from Australian authorities. Not many Australians have the knowledge of an Australian Soldier Settlement scheme established there after WW11.some of whom were soldiers who fought there during the war. Peter DeGaris

**John**

I hiked with Charlie Lynn's company in 2012. Adventure Kokoda, did the full military history tour. Makes you proud, makes you respect the locals and their service. When Charlie Lynn talks we need to listen and then act.

**Nick**

Well done, Charlie Lynn. As a former participant on one of your treks, we are grateful for all the work you have done.

**Susan**

@L&P-B Everyone I know who has been there and walked the track describes it as an incredible experience and very moving. Was particularly educational when the last of the fuzzywuzzy angels were still alive and could recount their stories about fighting the Japanese and defeating them.

**Re: Tourism****tonE**

PNG foreign tourist arrivals totalled 15,400 in 2023 (Bali has that and more per day) and my understanding is about a 1/3 walk the KT. Even fewer make it to other important WW11 sites of Milne Bay, Rabaul or Kavieng. In my travels there mainly surfing, fishing and seeking out ANZ WW11 sites it is best described as a "spooky" place especially in the very remote islands where Christian religion is intertwined with local spiritualism. Unfortunately, the threat of violence is ever-present (our boat was floodlit from dusk to dawn with an armed guard on board), even though the agreed-upon visitation fee was paid to make landfall or surf the village-owned reefs, and all landed fish is given to the appropriate village. Speaking with villagers, the money paid is never distributed and stays in the hands of a few, and I believe this is also the situation on the KT, hence the violence that has been directed at the walkers. It's a complex place.

**Re: Military Heritage****Tom**

Australia has changed. People are no longer proud of our Western democratic heritage and have no interest in those who fought and died to defend those values. In the new era of a fractured Australian identity with its cultural relativism, identity politics and general wokeness, who wants to experience the Kokoda Track and pay homage to those who made great sacrifices for the old Australia?

**Who Are The Brain Police**

Charlie Lynn has been virtually the sole voice advocating for the real needs of Kokoda Trail villagers and of the need to properly maintain the military history of the area for a long time now, but the Canberra bureaucrats and the "progressives" who see everything through their own strange lens have been relentlessly chipping away at this most important part of our history. I fear what will happen when Charlie is no longer on the scene.

**Jim**

Unfortunately, there are now many in Australia who deliberately try to erase our "good" history and focus on every negative aspect they can find or invent.

They want to take over, eventually, and many of our present politicians and Canberra bureaucrats are handing it to them on a platter.

**Bev**

@Tom, The old Australians are proud of our history. Proud enough to have put their lives in danger to make sure our country stayed free. Also, apparently, some of our new ones as well, as Ahmed Al Ahmed did at Bondi.

**Bilby0A**

Kokoda represents so many aspects of Australian history and culture. After reading 'Blamey' by Brent Taylor, it is not hard to see how the Australian military was shaped by the experience. The lessons too

are compelling: the initial pursuit of the Japanese and the defence of Kokoda would not have happened had Reserve infantry and artillery units not been available; we subordinated the efforts of Australian soldiers so that our ally could take global recognition of protecting Port Moresby; the public had no sense of the danger posed to Australia until the enemy were at the gates - life was just too comfortable.. Kokoda reminds us that we discard the strategic value of a strong Reserve Defence Force at our peril. I won't rant on about woke - I have witnessed the chaos and disharmony caused in native villages, but those that sprout 'equity and diversity' to people who just want a peaceful coexistence with clean water.....

### **Jim**

There are now, unfortunately, many in Australia who deliberately try to erase any of our "good" history and focus on every negative aspect they can find or invent.

They want to take over, eventually, and many of our present politicians and Canberra bureaucrats are handing it to them on a platter.

### **John**

It wouldn't take long for the Kokoda veterans to sort out the public servants who are imposing their woke issues on locals. If these public servants were forced to spend a year on the trail on local pay, they might learn something about survival in the real world.

### **Pamela**

Honest historical history doesn't exist in Australia and definitely not in PNG. It died many years ago. Politicians like Albanese have used the Trail for political posturing and capital, only walking a few 100 metres. in safety accompanied by an entourage to do their bidding. .

The Kokoda Trail is now a commercial trail full of people Instagramming and TikToking themselves in safari-like camps. I am wondering if there will be a writers' week on the Kokoda Trail this year to spread their diatribe and their cancel culture to the local people.

I was privileged to work in PNG as a teacher many years ago and did a prac teaching placement at Sogeri. I was able to walk a small fraction of the trail-it was hard. Actually, dreadfully hard. The wonderful Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels who led Aussie soldiers are never acknowledged now for their bravery and fortitude. Many Australian soldiers would have not returned but for them. As an afterthought, I wonder if Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels has been woked out of history as well?

### **Raymond**

As one whose father volunteered to serve in WW2 and was injured on the Kokoda trail, having served in Milne Bay, I don't take kindly to those who ignore that part of our history, and who claim that social justice/climate/woke should override any acknowledgement of our past.

### **Anthony**

We in Australia would do well to fix this up. Kokoda and Milne Bay are Australia's only contributions to the War in the Pacific, and those only because what is now Papua New Guinea was legally controlled by Australia at the time. We. Australia did not send any of our soldiers to serve overseas after the election of PM John Curtin (Labour). Those who fought in the fall of Singapore and in the North African desert had been sent under the previous Menzies government. Curtin is often praised for bring back stoops to 'defend Australia' but the Japanese advances ha been stopped by the US navy at Midway, Gaudal canal and Coral Sea but US soldiers were left to clean the Japanese out of the Islands on their

own. Australia did not even mount an attempt to rescue the Australian prisoners at Sandakan despite prior intelligence of a death march.

**William**

I served as a Chaplain at the Royal Military College, where Australia's significant battles are remembered with honour. One year I found in Canberra the person who, as a young officer, was with the first group on Kokoda to turn back the enemy, to be guest speaker at their dinner.