

SORRY DAY AT TILBA



Wed 15 June 2016

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Photo: Merryn Apma, centre, spoke at the Sorry Day event and is pictured in her gallery back in March when she hosted a concert with artist Ray Thomas and Archie Roach.

About 40 people attended a community-initiated event at the Open Sanctuary, Tilba Tilba, to recognise National Sorry Day on Thursday, May 26.

At the recognition, held at the foot of Gulaga, people shared experiences, listened to and reflected on the stories and silences that have shaped the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.

The Yuin people were acknowledged as the original custodians of the land and Heather May gave the 'welcome to country'.

The group listened attentively to a letter written for the occasion by a local artist, Merryn Apma, who was traveling to Melbourne for the Long Walk as part of Reconciliation Week. Merryn is one of the Stolen Generation, was a board member of Stolen Generations Victoria and worked as a specialist counsellor to Aboriginal people suffering from dispossession, abuse and lack of love as a result of time spent in institutions or foster homes.

A gentle discussion followed in which non-Aboriginal people shared their personal encounters, experiences and feelings. Their stories were poignant but not without humour or hope. They expressed their sorrow for the treatment of Aboriginal Australians and gratitude for their resilience and forgiveness.

Eurobodalla's Senior Citizen of the Year, 2015, Mal Dibden, told a family story from the early 1840s, when his great grandfather, Charles Robertson, then an infant, and possibly the first white infant in the area, was taken from a wooden crib on the verandah of the family home near Pambula. He was returned in good health a week later. "So I'm grateful", said Mal, "because I and my family would not be here".

A local poet, Noel Davis, acknowledged the richness and value of Aboriginal spirituality and knowledge, borne of long association with country. Many expressed their shared concern for the environment and their commitment and desire to work together to care for country.

As a member of The Gulaga Board of Management, Mal Dibden expressed optimism about the conservation and appropriate development of the Gulaga and Biamanga National Parks.

The evening ended with Archie Roach's song, 'Took the children away' and further chat over warming soup, barbecued meal and sweets.

The organisers wish to thank the Open Sanctuary community for their hospitality, the Laudate trio, David Oliphant, Denise Perroux and Michael Wheatley, for the musical preamble, Central Tilba School for the loan of the barbecue equipment, Woolworths and IGA, Narooma, for their donation of provisions and to all who brought home-made food.