

Chinese Community Council of Australia Incorporated

Media Release

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Victoria apologises for unjust laws against the Chinese

During the 19th century gold rush era, men from many nations flocked to the goldfields in America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. To the Chinese, America was known as the Gold Mountain and Australia and New Zealand as the New Gold Mountain. However, the Chinese were not welcome and faced many difficulties, including governments that passed discriminatory anti-Chinese legislation to restrict their numbers and rights.

In Australia, the Victorian colonial government was the first to pass such legislation in 1855 which imposed a head tax and limited the number of Chinese a ship was permitted to carry. To overcome these restrictions, passengers disembarked in South Australia, and made the long walk overland to the Victorian goldfields. Other colonial governments such as New South Wales soon followed suit as did the governments of New Zealand, Canada and America.

It has taken a long time for these unjust policies to be recognised as such and the first government to apologise for laws against Chinese immigrants was New Zealand's prime minister Helen Clark on 12 February 2002, Canada's prime minister Stephen Harper did likewise on 22 June 2006, California on 17 July 2009, the US Senate in October 2011 and the US House of Representatives in June 2012.

No such apology had been given by any Australian premier or prime minister until the 25 May 2017 when the Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews and also the Opposition leader Matthew Guy did so in Parliament House. The occasion was at a reception to welcome those who had taken part in a re-enactment of the *Walk from Robe* in South Australia to the Victorian goldfields which the Chinese did 160 years ago.

This *Walk from Robe* is part of a 2017 project organised by the Victoria Chapter of the Chinese Community Council of Australia. It will be followed by a conference *Beyond the New Gold Mountain* at the RMIT University on June 24 and an exhibition at the Immigration Museum in Melbourne to be opened on August 18.

The Lambing Flat (present day Young) riots of 1860-1861 were a series of attacks by European miners against the Chinese on the Burrangong goldfields in NSW. This led to the passing of the NSW Chinese Immigrant Regulation and Restriction Act of 1861. The NSW Chapter of the Chinese Community Council of Australia will now endeavour to get a similar acknowledgement from the NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian and Opposition leader Luke Foley.

In David Hill's book "Gold -The fever that forever changed Australia," the chapter on the Chinese begins: *No other group during the Australian gold era would suffer the same persecution, violence, murder and official discrimination as the Chinese.*

CCCA's national secretary Daphne Lowe Kelley said, "The trials and tribulations of the early Chinese must not be forgotten for they paved the way for those who have come in more recent years."

From the descendants of those who came from the counties of Guangdong's Pearl River delta to those who have come via another country and to the latest arrivals from all over China; today, those of Chinese descent comprise about one million or approximately four per cent of Australia's population.

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