

MINUTE

AUSTRALIAN ELECTORAL COMMISSION

**To : Andrew Moyes
AEO for Western Australia
Re: Naming of the new WA Electoral Division**

File :

I would like to submit the name of "**Coombs**" to be used as the name of Western Australia's new electoral Division. (Dr Herbert Cole Coombs, 1906 – 1997)

Dr H C (Nugget) Coombs was born in Kalamunda in 1906. He was educated at Perth Modern School and worked as a teacher and on the wharves to help pay his way through university. He was, I feel, a great West Australian and worthy of having a Division named after him.

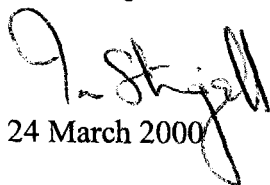
A public administrator and economist, environmentalist and friend of the Aboriginal people and founder-Chancellor of the ANU. His contribution to Australia was enormous and his links to WA make his name acceptable.

His achievements included:

- Director-General of Post-War Reconstruction
- Governor of the Reserve Bank
- Chairman of the Australian Council for Aboriginal Affairs
- Chairman of the Australian Council for the Arts
- Chancellor of the ANU

I have attached further information about Dr Coombs, for your information.

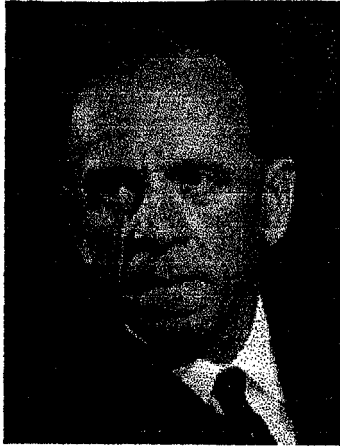
Ian Stringall



24 March 2000

GRADUATE

"Nugget" Coombs - a special Australian



Public servant extraordinaire, indigenous activist, economist, environmentalist, social thinker, but above all, a man of vision-this is how Dr H C "Nugget" Coombs will be remembered by Australians. Dr Coombs died on 29 October 1997 at the age of ninety-one.

Leaders around the country paid tribute to the extraordinary vision which saw Coombs play such an influential role in shaping modern Australia.

That vision holds a particular significance for the ANU as the University represented one of "Nugget" Coombs' dreams for post-war Australia-one which he lived to see fully realised.

ANU Chancellor Professor Peter Baume said, "Dr Coombs was The Australian National University's strongest supporter, greatest friend and most persuasive advocate."

"He was the driving force behind the creation of the University as part of the nation's post-World War II reconstruction effort. It was his view that Australia ought to have a postgraduate and research university and the success of the ANU in achieving that vision has much to do with Dr Coombs' involvement in its academic and administrative life" said the Chancellor.

His continued involvement with the University-as founder, as chancellor, as visiting fellow-endeared him to many within the ANU community. A man who "genuinely loved people and mixed with ease among all levels of Australian society", "a man of wisdom and compassion" and "a great and special friend" are some of the ways colleagues describe him. He was a very special Australian.

Herbert Cole Coombs was born in 1906 in Western Australia. The son of a stationmaster, he worked as a teacher and on the wharves to help pay his way through university. He proved to be a brilliant student and was soon recognised as possessing an exceptional talent for economics. In 1935, at only 28, he became Assistant Economist at the Commonwealth Bank. Four years later he had risen to the position of Economist at the Commonwealth Treasury and in 1942 he was appointed Director of Rationing for the Federal Government.

From 1943 to 1949 he was Director-General of Post-War Reconstruction, a post which demanded all of his celebrated vision

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and energy. He attended the Bretton Woods conference on monetary policy which saw the establishment of the International Monetary Fund. From 1949 to 1968 as Governor of the Commonwealth Bank (later named the Reserve Bank) he directed Australia's monetary policy.

In 1968 Dr Coombs became Chancellor of the ANU. When he finished his term in 1976 he took up a fresh challenge, becoming a visiting fellow at the Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies (CRES) and the North Australian Research Unit (NARU). His twenty years at CRES proved ideal for the devotion of his talents and energies to the fields of aboriginal and environmental studies.

A special edition of the ANU Reporter was published late last year to commemorate "Nugget's" life and colleagues shared some of their favourite stories and memories of him.

"The most enduring memory of Nugget is his humanity," said Henry Nix, Director of CRES and long time friend and colleague. "His concern for the underdog and the disadvantaged never wavered. He remained unassuming and kept a low profile whatever the occasion" according to Professor Nix.

Helen Ross worked closely with Dr Coombs during his last ten years as a visiting fellow and witnessed yet another example of his vision-"his dream of CRES maintaining research strength in Aborigines and the environment." She also recalled his generosity with his time and expertise-"his door was always open to other academics working in Aboriginal topics, to whom he gave great encouragement, to his many Aboriginal friends, and to a number of activists."

Frank Fenner fondly recalled the transition from the "young public servant, clean shaven, in suit and tie,...[to]...the academic, bearded, in open-neck shirt and pullover". Professor Fenner also remembered how Dr Coombs displayed "wisdom and compassion" throughout these and other changes in his life.

One of the visions dear to Dr Coombs was that of achieving reconciliation with Aboriginal people. When working with him on a conference in Kununurra about the plight of Aboriginal people in the East Kimberley, John Dash of the Centre for Continuing Education was struck by Nugget's optimism in the face of continued setbacks.

"My dismay [at negative press coverage of the conference] was somewhat softened by Nugget Coombs who saw a positive side to all this and told me that while ever the struggle continues it means that 'we are winning'. I thought then that my disappointment was insignificant compared with the many years of disappointment Nugget had endured while trying to raise the consciousness of Australians towards Aborigines. But he still maintained an optimism and faith in the Australian people" said John Dash.

For many connected with the ANU, the words of Ettie Oakman, his

secretary for his twenty-year period at CRES, will strike a chord "it is difficult to summarise in a few lines my great admiration for Dr Coombs, the tremendous amount of work he did, and the overwhelming impact he had on all who came into contact with him....I will remember him as a great and special friend who had a great influence on my life."

To honour the memory of Dr H C "Nugget" Coombs the University has announced the introduction of unique Aboriginal Studies Scholarships worth up to \$100,000 for innovative undergraduate and postgraduate scholars who combine traditional academic disciplines with traditional indigenous knowledge. The Nugget Coombs Scholarships will fund residence and travel costs for students based in Darwin at NARU.

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H.C. Coombs Building and H.C. Coombs Lecture Theatre

Dr H.C. Coombs (1906-1997) was Chancellor of the ANU from 1968-76 but his active interest in the University spans nearly four decades. As Director-General of Post-War Reconstruction, he was a member of the Interim Council and then of Council, serving as Deputy Chair from 1957 and Pro-Chancellor, from 1959-1968. Dr Coombs was the instigator of many initiatives in the University, including the Creative Arts Fellowship for Australian artists and the establishment of the North Australian Research Unit. He also served as a Governor of the Reserve Bank of Australia, Chair of the Australian Council for Aboriginal Affairs and Chair of the Australian Council for the Arts.

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URL : http://www.anu.edu.au/facilities/other/site_names/coombs.html