

Rejection of Ramsay defies common sense, says Berejiklian



NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian near Dubbo yesterday.
Andrew Clennell,Remy Varga, The Australian, 12:00AM June 14, 2018

Gladys Berejiklian says the rejection of the Ramsay Centre for Western Civilisation defies common sense and denies students the chance to understand a key part of history.

As John Howard, the head of the Ramsay Centre, said people should not forget Western civilisation made Australians “who we are”, the NSW Premier entered the debate sparked by the Australian National University’s rejection of a course and scholarships funded by Ramsay. “It defies common sense that subject matter regarding Western philosophy should be regarded as somehow offensive within an Australian university,” Ms Berejiklian said. “To deny its study is to deny the ability to critique, analyse and understand a key part of human history.”

Her comments follow those of NSW Education Minister Rob Stokes, who last week said it was “insane” for the ANU to knock back the course.

There has also been resistance at the University of Sydney, with more than 100 academics signing a letter opposing the Ramsay Centre being located there.

Yesterday on 2GB, Mr Howard said: “The Western cultural tradition, it’s not perfect, no tradition is, but essentially it’s made us who we are, it’s where we came from. “Western civilisation has given us parliamentary democracy, it’s

given us freedom, it's given us an enormous inheritance of literature and music and culture.

"By all means debate it, analyse it ... For heaven's sake, don't pretend it hasn't moulded us. I'm not using this as a platform to attack other civilisations, I'm using it as a vehicle to remind the Australian people of just who we are and where we came from."

Mr Howard said rather than look for reasons to apologise, he had "tried to live" by the belief that Australia's achievements were overwhelmingly positive. "We still have that in many areas of society, the determination to apologise for the past. Apologise for your own mistakes, recognise that our civilisation, like many, is flawed, recognise the blemishes — but you've got to look at the aggregate achievement. The aggregate achievement of Australia is massive. I look at Australia's past in positive terms, not in negative terms."

Last week Mr Stokes told *The Australian* he had been bemused by the ANU reaction towards the Ramsay Centre, which was established with proceeds from the estate of the late healthcare mogul Paul Ramsay. He encouraged NSW universities to take up the Western civilisation course. "I can't direct universities to take a centre ... but my powers are those of persuasion ... (and) this is a tremendous opportunity for young people," Mr Stokes said. "I might have personal views on what's taught in different campuses, but that doesn't give me the right to design those ideas being discussed. We desperately need more diversity, not less of it."

He noted there were already commercial relationships between universities and corporate bodies. "If it's OK to have fairly commercial arrangements when it comes to the scientific environment, why's it not OK to have a (relationship with a) centre in humanities?"