



First Wars



**THEY SAY THAT HISTORY IS WRITTEN
BY THE VICTORIOUS...UNTIL NOW
THE TRUE STORY OF THE FRONTIER
WARS IN AUSTRALIA**

There are more than 10,000 monuments across the country that honour the Australian war dead. But what of the bloody battles fought on Australian soil, in the longest-running war that established the nation?

In this ground-breaking three-part documentary series, award-winning filmmaker Rachel Perkins journeys across the country, to give voice to the story of the First Wars. And once given voice, it will change the narrative of the nation.

HD 3 x 60'
Blackfella Films

EPISODE SYNOPSES

EPISODE 1

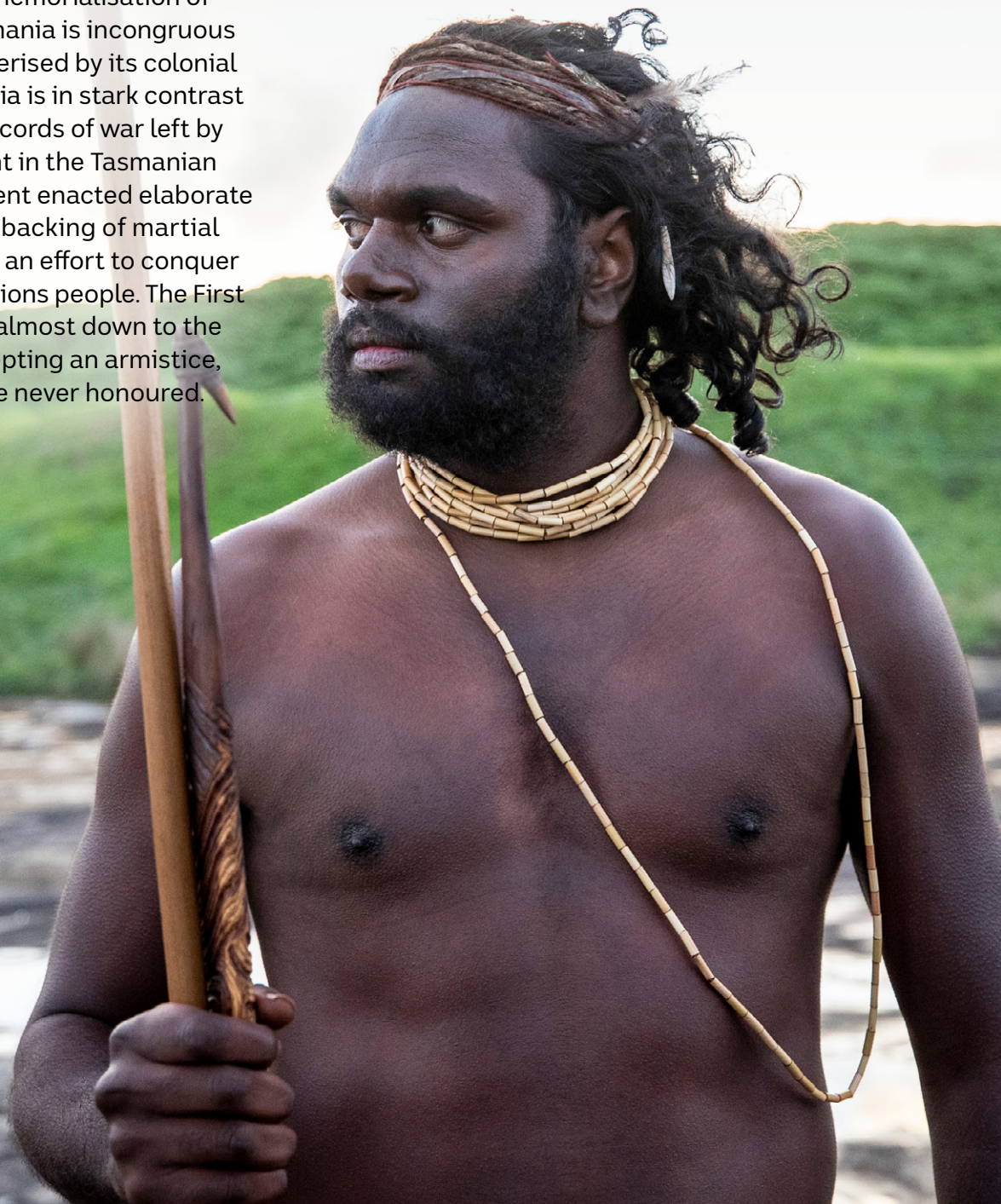
The modern-day city of Sydney was the birthplace of contemporary Australia and the first battleground in the First Wars. With no treaty in place, the relationship between the European occupying forces and the land's First Nations people was predetermined to be violent. Despite the best efforts of the first governor to make peace, he responded violently when faced with the first named resistance leader Pemulwuy.

EPISODE 2

The absence of public memorialisation of frontier warfare in Tasmania is incongruous on an island so characterised by its colonial past. This public amnesia is in stark contrast to the richly detailed records of war left by the colonial government in the Tasmanian archives. This government enacted elaborate military plans with the backing of martial law across the island in an effort to conquer the Tasmanian First Nations people. The First Nations people fought almost down to the last person before accepting an armistice, the terms of which were never honoured.

EPISODE 3

In 1837 the Colonial Office in London began opening up the entire territory of Australia for sale and the great squatting age began. The north of Australia was the final frontier and with the technological advancement of guns, the proliferation of horses and the use of native police, the battle for the north tipped irreversibly in favour of the squatters.



CREATIVE TEAM

DARREN DALE PRODUCER

Darren has produced a slew of internationally acclaimed and multi award-winning TV drama series including *Total Control*, *Redfern Now* and *Deep Water* as well as seminal documentary series including *First Contact* and *First Australians*.

Darren's work on documentaries has been equally acclaimed, with *The Tall Man* receiving the inaugural Walkley Award for Documentary. *Maralinga Tjarutja*, produced with Jacob

Hickey, won the 2020 AACTA Award for Best Direction in Nonfiction Television and the Silver Award for Documentary (Human Rights) at the 2021 New York Festivals TV & Film Awards.

Darren is a Member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences and has been a company director of Blackfella Films since 2000.



CREATIVE TEAM

RACHEL PERKINS PRODUCER, DIRECTOR, WRITER & PRESENTER

Rachel's filmmaking career spans three decades. She has directed internationally acclaimed and multi award-winning TV drama series including *Total Control*, *Mystery Road* and *Redfern Now*, as well as feature films including *Jasper Jones*, *Radiance* and the box office smash *Bran Nue Dae*. Rachel also wrote, directed and co-produced the groundbreaking seven-hour documentary series *First Australians*, which received Australia's top honours including AFI and IF Awards, the UN Media Peace Prize, TV Week Logie, and the Writers and Directors Guild of Australia Awards.

Rachel founded Australia's premier Indigenous production company Blackfella Films in 1992 and has contributed extensively to the development of Indigenous filmmakers in Australia and, more broadly, to the Australian film and television industry.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

RACHEL PERKINS

Telling the story of the *First Wars* has been the greatest privilege. It took three years to make but despite the significant collective effort to create this series, I am still left with feelings of inadequacy. This is an epic story. How can three hours of television contain more than 100 years of history across a whole continent? And even for those stories that are included, it is not possible to 'fix' the history or deliver justice to the people depicted.

Notwithstanding these limitations, my hope is that this series will stimulate not just conversation, but action. My hope is that it will contribute to the building groundswell that seeks to re-set the relationship between Indigenous people and the state, as the representative of the Australian people. This hope is not grounded in the naive fantasy that storytelling is the answer. After all, this series is not the first of its kind in this country. But this series does land at a pivotal time. Calls for a formal process of truth-telling, as part of a Makaratta agreement-making commission, have been requested through the Uluru Statement from the Heart. And the current Australian government has answered this call, agreeing to enact this request in full.

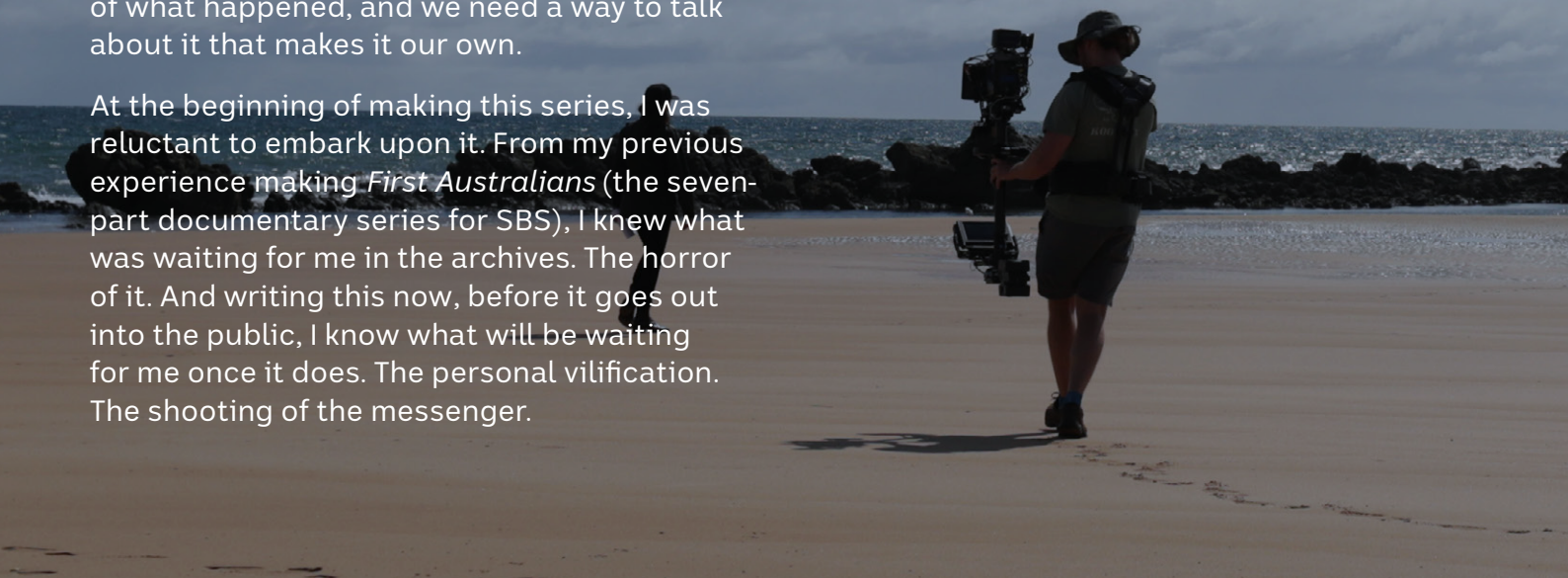
So, if there was ever a time for the Australian people to understand how their nation was born, the time is now. To shift the relationship, it will need the momentum that comes with widespread community understanding. And this is why I chose to call this series *First Wars*. We need to understand the fundamental truth of what happened, and we need a way to talk about it that makes it our own.

At the beginning of making this series, I was reluctant to embark upon it. From my previous experience making *First Australians* (the seven-part documentary series for SBS), I knew what was waiting for me in the archives. The horror of it. And writing this now, before it goes out into the public, I know what will be waiting for me once it does. The personal vilification. The shooting of the messenger.

As an advance case for my own defence, my approach throughout the creation of the series has been to avoid weaponising this story. This is a shared history. Warfare by its very nature is. And we must work out how to recover from the burden of it together. This is why we very deliberately ensured the voices of this series are both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, more than 50 interviewees in all.

This series does not, however, claim to be 'objective'. My own family was subjected to the warfare on the frontier – on both its Arrernte and Kalkadoon sides. As Professor Marcia Langton points out in her final interview in the series, Indigenous people "are burning with a desire for justice". I am one of those people and as we travelled to every jurisdiction in Australia, meeting Aboriginal people and hearing their stories, that burning desire became stronger.

And for those who deny this history – and they will be many – if the voices of those Aboriginal people are not enough, there are the archives, and the historical research and writing by leading historians. And despite what have been called the 'history wars', it is almost impossible to find a qualified, reputable historian who doesn't agree this was a war. The evidence is too substantial. To those historians who have brought this story to light over many decades, we owe a great debt for their work. And I hope that perhaps, in my lifetime, we will see the work of restoring this history to our nation completed.



CREATIVE TEAM

JACOB HICKEY WRITER

Jacob started his career in BBC Current Affairs and Documentary and worked on many award-winning projects before moving to Australia. He wrote and directed the feature length documentary *Inside the Firestorm*, which told the story of Australia's worst bushfire disaster and went on to win an AFI Award for Best Direction in a Documentary.

Jacob has worked on multiple projects with Blackfella Films including *First Contact*, *DNA Nation*, *Deep Water: The Real Story* and the award-winning documentary *Maralinga Tjarutja*.

