

## THE FIRST SOVEREIGN NATIONS

relations to each other, and their rights of property remain undisturbed.<sup>8</sup>

A second common misconception is that the Aboriginal peoples were not in possession of the lands through which they travelled. They had not fully established their ownership. Without some form of agriculture, their land rights could not be recognised and they should make way for people who would use the land more productively. This has been a widely canvassed view in Australia, despite the vast accumulation of ethnographic information from as far back as the 1790s that has established beyond reasonable doubt that the Indigenous Australians were indeed land owners who used their country in a great diversity of ways, as Bruce Pascoe has explained in his recent bestselling book *Dark Emu*.<sup>9</sup> This was the conclusion made by Philip Gidley King, the third governor of New South Wales. When he was preparing to leave the colony in 1807, he drafted a memo for his successor, William Bligh, in which he observed, apropos the Aboriginal peoples, that he had 'ever considered them the real proprietors of the soil'.<sup>10</sup> Succeeding governors came to the same conclusion. In 1821, while discussing the Aboriginal inhabitants with a pioneer missionary, Governor Sir Thomas Brisbane remarked that 'we have taken the land from the Aborigines of the country and a remuneration ought to be made'.<sup>11</sup> Tasmania's Governor Arthur agreed, arguing that the utmost care should be taken in providing reparation 'for whatever land is taken possession of by the British settlers; for as each tribe claims some portion of territory, which they consider peculiarly their own,