**CLOSE TO THE BONE – information kit**

**SYNOPSES**

**Short synopsis: (30 words)**

Aboriginal and settler descendants come together to confront legacies of violence from Australia’s pastoral frontier. Can the scars of past atrocities be reconciled and healed through the act of truth-telling?

**Long synopsis: (219 words)**

In September 1852, in South Australia’s Flinders Ranges, the body of 16-year-old shepherd, James Brown, was found, mutilated and castrated. The next day, a reprisal party of 17 men pursued a flock of stolen sheep and killed a disputed number of First Nations people.

Almost 170 years later, descendants of James Brown’s family return to the Flinders Ranges and reach out to people from some of the Aboriginal groups that share memories from the traumatic early period of European invasion.

What happens when stories of violence and conquest on Australia’s colonial frontier are more than just a historical abstraction, with powerful and personal meanings for families and individuals on both sides of the inter-cultural frontier? How do memories of colonial violence still resonate powerfully today, especially within the lives of many First Nations people? And can the scars of past atrocities be reconciled and healed through the act of truth-telling?

**Close to the Bone** is a practical exercise in ‘truth and reconciliation’, engaging with culturally and politically challenging material, in an effort to forge shared understandings. The film reveals diverse understandings of historic events, while seeking to resolve a shared path forward. In doing so, the film is informed by Charlie Perkins’ immortal words of: ***‘We know we cannot live in the past, but the past lives in us.’***

**CLOSE TO THE BONE**

**Principal credits:**

Written, directed and produced by Malcolm McKinnon and Jared Thomas

Executive Producer: Margot Phillipson

Photography - Max Mackinnon, Kim Mavromatis and Malcolm McKinnon

Editor: Malcolm McKinnon

Music: Jenny M. Thomas and Bush Gothic

Developed and financed with the assistance of the South Australian Film Corporation

Financed with the assistance of Documentary Australia Foundation

Assisted by the History Trust of South Australia and private donors including the Suzanne Elliott Charitable Trust, the Graham F. Smith peace Foundation, the Perera & Picco Charitable Foundation and the Don Dunstan Foundation.

Produced in partnership with the South Australian Museum and the University of South Australia.

(c) 2022, Reckless Eye Productions

28 mins

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**Character sketches:**

**Mike Brown** is a maverick member of an establishment South Australian family. His ancestors arrived in South Australia during the early years of the colony and were amongst the first wave of pioneering pastoralists taking sheep into country north of Adelaide. In the early 1980s he discovered the violent history of his ancestor’s pastoral endeavours, motivating him to pursue practical rapprochement with Aboriginal people in the Flinders Ranges and elsewhere. Other members of Mike’s family are also involved in this ongoing project, including his daughter **Anjali Nelson**.

**Ken McKenzie** is an elderly man of Adnyamathanha and Kuyani descent who has lived and worked all his life in the Flinders Ranges. The eldest of thirteen children, Ken grew up at Nepabunna mission learning traditional Aboriginal cultural knowledge alongside the teachings of the church. He worked on cattle stations and then on the railways until, after a personal epiphany, he became a Christian pastor. At the same time, he maintained knowledge of important sites and stories on his traditional country. Now retired, Ken remains a dedicated storyteller, painter and singer, often performing his own songs.

**Regina McKenzie** is Ken McKenzie’s youngest sibling. Feisty and articulate, Regina is a leader in campaigns to defend her traditional country from inappropriate development and exploitation, including excessive water extraction and a proposed nuclear waste dump. She also holds strong views about the legacy of violence against Aboriginal people in colonial times.

**Jared Thomas**, a man of Nukunu and Ngadjuri descent, is an author and museum curator. Jared grew up in Port Augusta and continues to spend regular time on Nukunu traditional lands. In recent years he has been active in native title negotiations on behalf of the Nukunu people. At the same time he works hard to maintain friendly relations with people from neighbouring Aboriginal groups, understanding this to be a continuation of cultural protocols that have functioned for thousands of years.

**Jackie Crawford** is Ken McKenzie’s daughter and, like her father, she reconciles Aboriginal and Christian spiritual beliefs within her daily life. She has strong knowledge of her family history, including stories of traumatic events that she recognises as having continuing impacts and resonance today.

**Amanda Richards** is a woman of Barngarla and Adnymathanha descent. She and others from her immediate family have developed a relationship with Mike Brown and his family, looking to reconcile difficult and painful episodes in their respective family histories

**Skye Krichauff** is a historian with special knowledge of the history of conflict between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in colonial South Australia. She is currently lead researcher on an Australian Research Council funded project entitled *Reconciling with the Frontier*.

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**Filmmaker Biographies:**

**Malcolm McKinnon** (co-writer / director / producer and film editor) is an artist, filmmaker, writer and ‘ghost wrangler’. He has directed over one hundred social history documentary films, most of which present stories from rural and remote Australia. He has produced films and radio documentaries for national and regional television, including the arts documentaries “Seriously Singing”, “Making Dust” and “Miner Poets”. He has also made films for festivals and community events and for long-term exhibition in museums across Australia.

**Jared Thomas** (co-writer / director / producer) is an author of young adult fiction, a playwright and a museum curator. Several of his books have been shortlisted for awards, and he has been awarded three writing fellowships. He is currently the William and Margaret Geary Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art and Material Culture at the South Australian Museum. Jared is a Nukunu man who grew up in Port Augusta and continues to spend regular time on country.

**Margot Phillipson** (executive producer) has over 40 years experience as a writer, producer and executive producer of television programs. She enjoyed a long career at ABC TV, culminating in a decade as Factual Executive Producer where she produced numerous documentaries for prime time ABCTV.

**Max Mackinnon** (principle DOP) is a film maker and cinematographer with extensive experience working in-house for ABC television and, more recently, as director of his own documentary film production company.

**Jenny M. Thomas** (composer) is a singer and multi-instrumentalist adept in a diverse range of musical genres. For this project she has worked with her band Bush Gothic to create and perform a musical score that combines menace and beauty.

**RECKLESS EYE PRODUCTIONS** is a small, independent production house based in Melbourne. The company has undertaken film and other digital media projects in all Australian states and territories.