



**Aboriginal Heritage Office**

Ku-ring-gai, Lane Cove, North Sydney, Northern Beaches,  
Strathfield and Willoughby Councils

[www.aboriginalheritage.org](http://www.aboriginalheritage.org)

**Yarnuping Education Series**

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## **Yarnuping 6      Reconciliation Week – 27 May – 3<sup>rd</sup> June**

Karen Smith, Education Officer

Reconciliation Week marks significant dates on the Aboriginal Calendar, and begins on the 27<sup>th</sup> May and concludes on the 3<sup>rd</sup> June. May 27 and June 3 are important dates in Australia's history.

May 27 marks the anniversary of the **1967 referendum** when Australians, as a nation, voted to remove clauses in the Australian Constitution that discriminated against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The 26<sup>th</sup> of May, the day before National Reconciliation Week, is **National Sorry Day**. A day to remember and honour the Stolen Generations, nationally. (Please read Yarnuping 5 - Education – Sorry Day.) June 3 is the anniversary of the historic **1992 Mabo decision** in which the High Court of Australia recognised native title—the recognition that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights over their lands did survive British colonisation.

The theme of Reconciliation Week is decided in May of the previous year.

Reconciliation Australia, has a Chief Executive Officer, Co -Chairs and a board and believe that Australia's ability to move forward as a nation relies on individuals, organisations and communities coming together in the spirit of reconciliation.

We all have a role to play when it comes to reconciliation, and in playing our part we collectively build relationships and communities that value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, histories, cultures, and futures.

Reconciliation is a journey for all Australians – as individuals, families, communities, organisations and importantly as a nation. At the heart of this journey are relationships between the broader Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

*“When we come together to build mutual respect and understanding, we shape a better future for all Australians.”*

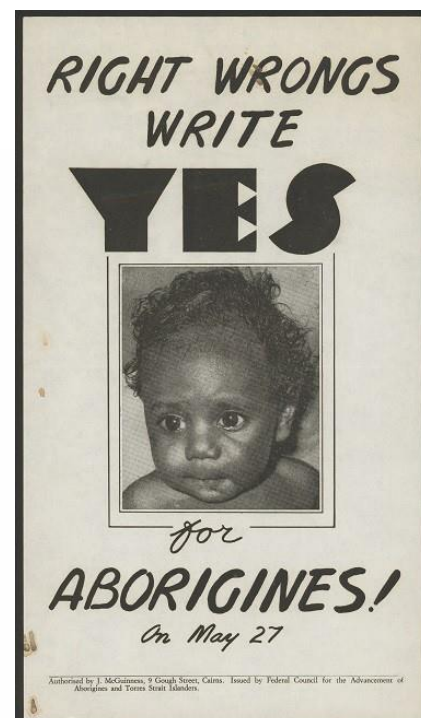
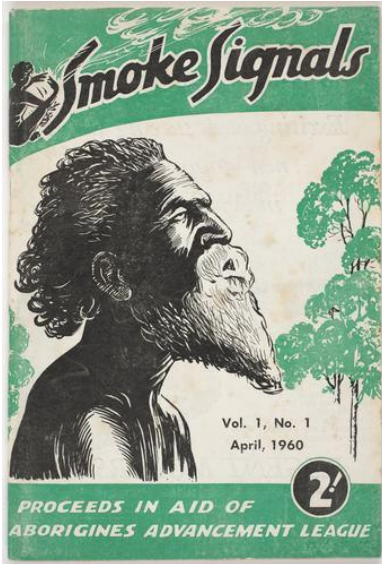
<https://nrw.reconciliation.org.au/>

### **The 1967 Referendum**

Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> of May marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1967 Referendum.

The referendum asked Australia to vote to amend the Constitution to allow the Commonwealth to make laws for Aboriginal people. It also asked Australians that Aboriginal people be included on the census

The Referendum was a landmark day for Aboriginal people, in which Australians voted overwhelmingly “yes” in amending the two sections in the constitution. The referendum campaign publicized how Aboriginal people lived with all sorts of restrictions on their lives, social and legislative. Australia voted with a significant majority in all six states and an overall majority of almost 91 per cent.



According to political historian, Scott Bennett, these sections were originally included in the original Constitution because of the widely held beliefs that:

- Indigenous people were 'dying out' and, hence, would soon cease to be a factor in questions of representation.
- Indigenous people were not intellectually worthy of a place in the political system.

In 1902, a Tasmanian Member of Parliament dismissed the need to include Indigenous people in a national census on the basis that:

*"There is no scientific evidence that he is a human being at all."*

<https://australianstogether.org.au/discover/australian-history/1967-referendum/>

Before the Referendum, laws for Aboriginal people were the responsibility of the different states, and laws varied greatly from state to state. Supporters of the Referendum believed giving power to the Federal Government would act in the best interests of Aboriginal people leading to better lives and conditions.



## Effects of the Referendum

Many Indigenous people regard the 1967 Referendum as a symbolic turning point, revealing a widespread desire by the people of Australia for Indigenous equality in Australia. Others feel that the Referendum was irrelevant to their lives, having little effect on the daily discrimination they experience.

The effects of the Referendum cannot be underestimated. But despite the publicity showing the referendum would give people better lives and only be used to effect positive change, this was not the case. The laws enacted actually eroded indigenous rights in some respects. Think recently on the Intervention in the Northern territory.

The Referendum often failed to protect or improve the lives and conditions of Aboriginal People and caused disillusionment. Activism continued including the modern land rights movement and activism through the legal system. Think of Eddie Mabo's fight for his land.

In terms of its practical significance, perhaps the main achievement of the Referendum was to raise the expectations of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people regarding Aboriginal rights and welfare.





## The 20 Year Anniversary of the Bridge Walk or Corroborree 2000

The 2000 Bridge Walk for Reconciliation was held in Sydney and other bridge walks occurred all around Australia. If we look at these walks nationally, we see the biggest demonstration of public support that has ever taken place in Australia. At its heart was a more meaningful relationship with Aboriginal people.



Sir William Deane, Governor- General, said *“All of us who are convinced of the rightness and urgency of the cause of Aboriginal reconciliation will be most effective and most persuasive if we have the strength and the wisdom to speak more quietly, more tolerantly and more constructively to our fellow Australians who are yet to be convinced”*

<https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/walk-for-reconciliation>

### Corroboree 2000

This included two events

1. the Council of Reconciliation meeting and
2. the Bridge Walk

Corroboree is a Sydney Language word defined as a group of ceremonies, including public performance of songs and dances, covering the whole of social, economic, legal, political, religious and cultural life of the Sydney Aboriginal people

## The Council for Reconciliation

The Council for Reconciliation was set up by the Government to foster a national commitment to the Reconciliation process and improve the relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. To understand Aboriginal people, their history of dispossession and present day disadvantage.

A gathering was held with about 25 Aboriginal community leaders from all over Australia. Including the State premiers, the Governor-General Sir William Deane and Prime Minister John Howard. It also included members of industry, business and further sectors that affect Aboriginal people. It produced a document of proposals for Reconciliation. It included the presentation by Aboriginal Leaders of 2 documents;

1. The Australian Declaration towards Reconciliation
2. The roadmap to Reconciliation

All the leaders who took part left their handprints on a reconciliation canvas – a symbolic act of great significance in Indigenous traditions.

## The 2000 Bridge Walk

Were you there? Perhaps your parents were. I remember walking myself with a group of like-minded friends. We were singing, filled with the joy of the day. The song we sang was *'Singing the Land'* by Melanie Shanahan from Arramaieda.

Do your parents or you think anything changed from this day when the biggest show of public support in Australia for a political event was witnessed?

Among the first group to cross were long-time Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights activist Faith Bandler as well as Bonita Mabo, widow of native title campaigner Eddie Mabo.



'Sorry' painted in the sky during Corroboree 2000.  
Courtesy of the National Library of Australia

*"Some marchers sang 'Treaty', the top-hit song by Aboriginal rock group Yothu Yindi, which could be heard being played down at the harbour. For some this powerful, en masse and state-choreographed journey of 'Walking together' for Reconciliation provided the good feelings of hope, pride and release. Yet for others attentive to the 'bad feelings' of national shame and the need for an apology, political redress was absent. For the Reconciliation Bridge Walk addressed a hopeful future, but it did not directly acknowledge the past."*

The day was charged with emotion. The chairwoman of the Council for Reconciliation described the day as *'awesome'* and *'emotional'*. The chairwoman of the NSW Council for Reconciliation, Linda Burney, was quoted saying *"a week ago, I was despairing about living in this Country. Today I feel great."*

<https://historiesofemotion.com/2015/05/25/say-sorry-you-bastard-postcolonial-shame-reconciliation-and-national-sorry-day/>

In 2000 everyone hoped that the then Prime Minister John Howard would say 'Sorry'. Many of the political leaders gave speeches but the Prime Minister only expressed 'regret' for past wrongs. Many in the audience turned their backs on Howard and called out 'Just say sorry'.

In 2000, no formal apology had been given by the Australian government. Aboriginal people had to wait another 10 years until Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's National Apology to Australia's Indigenous peoples of February 2008.

<https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/walk-for-reconciliation>







Australia kept walking. A week later, 60,000 people walked across the William Jolly Bridge in Brisbane. Many smaller walks followed throughout the country, in state capitals and regional towns, finishing in two big marches in Melbourne and Perth at the end of the year. The Melbourne walk, started at Flinders Street Station and finished at King's Domain gardens and boasted 300,000 people.

<http://www5.austlii.edu.au/au/orgs/car/m2000/1.htm>

<http://www5.austlii.edu.au/au/orgs/car/finalreport/appendices05.htm>

## The five dimensions of reconciliation

From the Reconciliation Week Website

### Race Relations

- All Australians understand and value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous cultures, rights, and experiences, which results in stronger relationships based on trust and respect and that are free of racism.
- **Goal:** Positive two-way relationships built on trust and respect exist between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians throughout society.
- **Action:** Overcome racism

### Equality and Equity

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples participate equally in a range of life opportunities and the unique rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are recognised and upheld.
- **Goal:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians participate equally and equitably in all areas of life – i.e. we have closed the gaps in life



outcomes – and the distinctive individual and collective rights and cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are universally recognised and respected. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are self-determining.

- **Action:** Renew focus on Closing the Gap

### **Institutional Integrity**

- The active support of reconciliation by the nation's political, business and community structures.
- **Goal:** Our political, business and community institutions actively support all dimensions of reconciliation.
- **Action:** Capitalise on the RAP Program to create a wider range of opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

### **Unity**

- An Australian society that values and recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage as a proud part of a shared national identity.
- **Goal:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and rights are a valued and recognised part of a shared national identity and, as a result, there is national unity.
- **Action:** Achieve a process to recognise Australia's First Peoples in our Constitution.

### **Historical Acceptance**

- All Australians understand and accept the wrongs of the past and their impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Australia makes amends for past policies and practices ensures these wrongs are never repeated.
- **Goal:** There is widespread acceptance of our nation's history and agreement that the wrongs of the past will never be repeated— there is truth, justice, healing and historical acceptance.
- **Action:** Acknowledge our past through education and understanding.