

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Dates of Significance

26 January – Survival Day

For many Australians, particularly among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, 26 January is not a day of celebration, but is seen as a day which commemorates the invasion by British settlers of lands already owned. For many, the day involves recognising the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including the trauma caused by government policies of assimilation and separation that saw many people removed from their traditional lands and culture.

13 February – National Apology Day

On 13 February 2008, then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd delivered a formal apology on behalf of the Australian Government, to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and in particular to people of the Stolen Generations. The Apology is now considered a defining moment in Australian history. This is a separate occasion from National Sorry Day (see below).

March – National Close the Gap Day

Close the Gap Day gives people the opportunity to show their support for closing the gap in health and life expectancy between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians. It is a chance for organisations and communities to hold events and raise awareness of the Aboriginal health crisis.

26 May – National Sorry Day

National Sorry Day is an opportunity to acknowledge the impact of the policies spanning more than 150 years of forcible removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families. The first National Sorry Day was held on 26 May 1998 following the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission report, *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* (1997). The report recommended that a national day of observance be declared.

27 May – Anniversary of the 1967 Referendum

The 1967 referendum made history as Australians voted overwhelmingly to amend the Constitution to allow the Commonwealth to make laws for Aboriginal people and include them in the census.

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27 May to 3 June – National Reconciliation Week

National Reconciliation Week (NRW) is celebrated across Australia every year from 27 May to 3 June. NRW was established by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation as a time for all Australians to learn about shared histories, cultures and achievements and a call to action to participate in national reconciliation. These dates commemorate two significant milestones in the Nation's reconciliation journey; the anniversaries of the successful 1967 Referendum and the High Court Mabo decision.

May – Gawler Reconciliation Community Fun Day

The Gawler Reconciliation Community Fun Day takes place during National Reconciliation Week each year. In 2015 the Gawler Reconciliation Action Group was formed. The group comprises representatives from the Gawler Health Service, Council, other key organisations and community. This group plans and implements Gawler's annual Reconciliation Event held in Apex Park. The event now attracts hundreds of people, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, from the local community and surrounding regions. The event is an opportunity to bring understanding and respect to all people involved. The event creates a vibrant and welcoming space for the community to gather and interact and helps to build a respectful community and a culture free from racism and discrimination.

3 June – Mabo Day

Mabo Day commemorates Eddie Koiki Mabo, the man who fought for recognition of the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the traditional owners of their land. On this day in 1992, the High Court of Australia decided that terra nullius (land belonging to no-one) should not have been applied to Australia. This decision recognised that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have rights to the land; rights that existed long before colonisation. The Mabo decision was a turning point for the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights, because it acknowledged their unique connection with the land. It also led to the Australian Parliament passing the Native Title Act in 1993. The decision was made in just less than 10 years from when the plaintiffs began their legal claim. Sadly, Eddie Mabo died in January 1992, just five months before the High Court made its decision.

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July – NAIDOC Week

NAIDOC Week celebrations are held across Australia each July to celebrate the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. NAIDOC is celebrated by Australians from all walks of life. The week is a great opportunity to participate in a range of activities and to support local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. NAIDOC originally stood for 'National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee'. This committee was once responsible for organising national activities during NAIDOC Week and its acronym has since become the name of the week itself.

4 August – National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day

Children's Day is a time for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to celebrate the strengths and culture of their children. The day is an opportunity for all Australians to show their support for Aboriginal children, as well as learn about the crucial impact that community, culture and family play in the life of every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child. The Day was established by the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) in 1988. Each year, SNAICC has a theme for Children's Day to highlight a significant issue, concern or hope for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

9 August – International Day of the World's Indigenous People

The United Nations' International Day of the World's Indigenous People is observed on 9 August each year to promote and protect the rights of the world's Indigenous population. This event also recognises the achievements and contributions that Indigenous people make to improve world issues such as environmental protection.

5 September – Indigenous Literacy Day

Indigenous Literacy Day is a national celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, stories, language and literacy. The Day acknowledges the disadvantages experienced in remote communities and encourages the rest of Australia to raise funds and advocate for more equal access to literacy resources for remote communities.

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The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flags

The Australian Aboriginal Flag was designed by artist Harold Thomas and first flown at Victoria Square in Adelaide, South Australia, on National Aborigines Day in July 1971. It became the official flag for the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra after it was first flown there in 1972. Since then, it has become a widely recognised symbol of the unity and identity of Aboriginal people.

- ♦ **Black** represents the Aboriginal people of Australia.
- ♦ **Yellow** circle represents the Sun, the giver of life and protector.
- ♦ **Red** represents the red earth, the red ochre used in ceremonies and Aboriginal peoples' spiritual relationship to the land.

The Torres Strait Islander flag was designed by the late Bernard Namok as a symbol of unity and identity for Torres Strait Islanders. Adopted in 1992, it was the winning entry in a design competition run by the Island Coordinating Council, a Queensland statutory body representing the community councils in the Torres Strait.

- ♦ **White** Dhari (headdress) is a symbol of the Torres Strait Islander people.
- ♦ **White** five-pointed star symbolises peace, the five major island groups, and the navigational importance of stars to the people of the Torres Strait.
- ♦ **Green** represents the land.
- ♦ **Black** represents the Torres Strait Islander people.
- ♦ **Blue** represents the sea.

Permission is not required to fly either the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander flags. However, the reproduction of either flag (for example, on a flyer or poster) must only occur in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968 and with the relevant permissions.