

First Nations Dates of Significance

26 January: Invasion Day / Survival Day / Day of Mourning

For many Australians, particularly First Nations peoples, the 26th of January is considered a day of mourning, not a day of celebration. The date commemorates the invasion by British settlers of lands already occupied, the ongoing trauma caused by government policies of assimilation, and the separation and removal of First Nations children from their families, cultures, and traditional lands. Due to these factors, the 26th of January continues to hold negative and painful connotations for many First Nations peoples.

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 First Nations people and the Stolen Generations. The Stolen Generations refers to the First Nations children and young people who were removed from their families by Australian federal and state government agencies and church missions between 1910 and 1970. This was the policy of assimilation. The Apology is now considered a defining moment in Australian history.

March: National Close the Gap Day

National Close the Gap Day is held each year on the third Thursday of March. Close the Gap was started in 2006 by First Nations and mainstream peak health and advocacy organisations. The campaign advocates for health equity between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians. The day is an opportunity to raise awareness for closing the gap in health and life expectancy.

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21 March: International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (IDERD)

IDERD commemorates the day in 1960, when police officers in Sharpeville, South Africa, opened fire and killed 69 people at a peaceful demonstration against apartheid. Today, it remains a time to focus on the harmful impacts of racism and to take real action towards tackling it. In 1999, the Howard government created 'Harmony Day', which sought to replace IDERD, and aligned with government views that racism was not an inherent problem in Australia. However, many acknowledge that referring to IDERD as 'Harmony Day' hides structural racism and its harmful impacts, and ignores the lived reality of racism.

25 April: ANZAC Day

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have served in every conflict and commitment involving Australian defence contingents since 1901. First Nations participation in World War I was limited due to the *Defence Act 1909* (Cth), which banned people from enlisting if they were 'not substantially of European origin or descent'. Many First Nations people concealed their identity so they could join and it is believed that up to 1,300 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women served on all fronts of World War I across Europe and Africa, including approx. 70 known men in the Gallipoli campaign.

26 May: National Sorry Day

National Sorry Day recognises the Stolen Generations - the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were forcibly removed from their families and communities. The day also acknowledges the ongoing impacts of policies spanning more than 150 years, that enabled and enforced such mistreatment. The first National Sorry Day was held in 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.

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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. The Uluru Statement from the Heart was delivered on the 50th anniversary of the 1967 referendum (May 27, 2017). The statement called for structural reform, including changing the Constitution and the establishment of a Voice to Parliament.

27 May to 3 June: National Reconciliation Week (NRW)

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 Australia's reconciliation journey; the anniversaries of the successful 1967 Referendum and the High Court Mabo decision.

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 activities and events are held each July right across Australia. The week is a time to celebrate the histories, cultures and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is also about acknowledging First Nations history of activism and protest. NAIDOC originally stood for 'National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee'. This committee was once responsible for organising national activities for 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 to celebrate the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. 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. The date was historically used to celebrate the birthdays of First Nations children who were taken from their families at a young age without knowing their birthday.

9 August: International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples

The United Nations' International Day of the World's Indigenous People is observed each year to promote and protect the rights of the world's Indigenous population. This event also recognises the achievements and contributions that Indigenous peoples make to improve world issues such as environmental protection. According to the United Nations, there are over 476 million Indigenous peoples living in 90 countries across the world, accounting for 6.2% of the global population.

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23 August: Anniversary of the Wave Hill Walk-Off

On this day in 1966, the Gurindji people, led by Vincent Lingiari, made history with the Wave Hill Walk-Off. The Walk-Off started as a strike for better wages and working conditions at the Wave Hill cattle station in the Northern Territory. The strike soon became more than that, leading to a seven-year action for land rights. In 1975, then Prime Minister Gough Whitlam ceremonially returned a portion of Gurindji land to the traditional owners by pouring a handful of soil into Vincent Lingiari's hand with the words, *'Vincent Lingiari, I solemnly hand to you these deeds as proof, in Australian law, that these lands belong to the Gurindji people'*.

September: Indigenous Literacy Day

Indigenous Literacy Day, presented by the Indigenous Literacy Foundation, is a national celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, stories, languages and literacy. The day acknowledges the disadvantages experienced in remote communities and encourages the rest of Australia to advocate, raise awareness and funds for more equal access to literacy resources for these communities.

14 October: Voice to Parliament Referendum

A First Nations Voice to Parliament protected by the Constitution is a key element of the Uluru Statement from the Heart. On 14 October 2023, a national referendum was held asking Australians the question *"A Proposed Law: to alter the Constitution to recognise the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice. Do you approve this proposed alteration?"* The vote was not successful.

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26 October: Anniversary of the Uluru Handback

Uluru is sacred to Anangu people and they lobbied for the return of their ancestral lands for decades. The ceremony to hand back the title took place at the base of Uluru in 1985. Hundreds of people looked on as the Governor-General passed over the title deeds for Uluru - Kata Tjuta to Anangu people. The traditional owners then signed an agreement to lease the area back to the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service for 99 years. A board of management was established with a majority of Anangu members and the park continues to be jointly managed. The Uluru climb was closed permanently on 26 October 2019, on the 34th anniversary of the handback.

10 December: Human Rights Day

Human Rights Day is held every year on 10 December. This was the day the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948. The UDHR is an important document that states the rights that every human being is entitled to regardless of their race, colour, religion, sex, language, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. The UDHR is available in more than 500 languages, making it the most translated document in the world. First Nations people often have to work harder to protect their human rights because of systemic racism and deep-rooted forms of discrimination.