

Track the History

The history of the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families

The timeline details the history of forcible removal of Indigenous children from their families. Information in the poster is primarily taken from the findings of the *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, and a wide range of other sources.

45 000 years ago

Rock engravings in South Australia suggest evidence of land inhabitation.

1451

Dutch explorers record the journeys of Macassan Trepangers (Indigenous traders from Indonesia) to northern Australia. Trade between the Macassans and Aboriginals continues until 1906.

1770

James Cook claims possession of the whole east coast of Australia. Cook raises the British flag at Possession Island, off Cape York Peninsula in Queensland.

1788

The First Fleet lands in Port Jackson – British settlement in Australia begins. Clashes between Aboriginal people and the settlers are reported over the next 10 years in the Parramatta and Hawkesbury areas.

1814

Governor Macquarie opens a school for Aboriginal children at Parramatta called the 'Native Institution'.

1830

Tasmanian Aboriginal people are resettled on Flinders Island without success. Later, the community is moved to Cape Barren Island.

1837

British Select Committee examines the treatment of indigenous peoples in all British colonies and recommends that 'Protectors of Aboriginals' be appointed in Australia.

1838

Myall Creek Massacre: Near Inverell (NSW), settlers shoot 28 Aboriginal people, mostly women and children. 11 Europeans were charged with murder but are acquitted. A new trial is held and seven men are charged with the murder of one Aboriginal child. They are found guilty and hanged.

1869

The *Aborigines Protection Act* (Vic) establishes an Aborigines Protection Board in Victoria to manage the interests of Aboriginals. The Governor can order the removal of any Aboriginal child from their family to a reformatory or industrial school.

1883

The NSW Aborigines Protection Board is established to manage the lives of 9,000 people.

1897

The *Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act* (Old) allows the Chief Protector to remove local Aboriginal people onto and between reserves and hold children in dormitories. Until 1965 the Director of Native Welfare is the legal guardian of all 'aboriginal' children whether their parents are living or not.

1901

Australia becomes a Federation. The Constitution states that Aboriginal People will not be counted in the census, and that the Commonwealth has the power to make laws relating to any race of people in Australia with the exception of Aboriginals. The federated states therefore retain exclusive power over Aboriginal affairs until the Constitution is amended in 1967.

1905

The *Aborigines Act* (WA) is passed. Under this law, the Chief Protector is made the legal guardian of every Aboriginal and 'half-caste' child under 16 years old. In the following years, other states and territories enact similar laws.

1909

The *Aborigines Protection Act* (NSW) gives the Aborigines Protection Board power to assume full control and custody of the child of an Aborigine if a court found the child to be neglected under the *Neglected Children and Juvenile Offenders Act 1905* (NSW).

1911

The *Aborigines Act* (SA) makes the Chief Protector the legal guardian of every Aboriginal and 'half-caste' child with additional wide-ranging powers to remove Indigenous people to and from reserves.

The *Northern Territory Aboriginals Ordinance* (Cth) gives the Chief Protector powers to assume 'the care, custody or control of any aboriginal or half caste if in his opinion it is necessary or desirable in the interests of the aboriginal or half caste for him to do so'. The *Aborigines Ordinance 1918* (Cth) extends the Chief Protector's control even further.

1928

Coniston Massacre, Northern Territory. Europeans shoot 32 Aboriginals after a white dingo trapper and station owner are attacked by Aboriginals. A court of inquiry says the European's action was 'justified'.

1935

The *Infants Welfare Act* (Tas) is used to remove Indigenous children on Cape Barren Island from their families. From 1928 until 1980 the head teacher on Cape Barren is appointed as a special constable with the powers and responsibilities of a police constable, including the power to remove a child for neglect under child welfare legislation.

1937

The first Commonwealth / State conference on 'native welfare' adopts assimilation as the national policy: *The destiny of the natives of aboriginal origin, but not of the full blood, lies in ultimate absorption... with a view to their taking their place in the white community on an equal footing with the whites.*

In 1951, at the third Commonwealth / State Conference on 'native welfare', assimilation is affirmed as the aim of 'native welfare' measures.

1938

Australian Aboriginals Conference held in Sydney. Meeting on January 26, the 150th Anniversary of NSW, Aboriginals mark the 'Day of Mourning'.

1948

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is adopted by the newly-formed United Nations, and supported by Australia.

1949

The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide is ratified by Australia. It comes into force in 1951.

1967

A national referendum is held to amend the Constitution. Australians confer power on the Commonwealth to make laws for Aboriginal people. Aboriginals are included in the census for the first time.

1969

By 1969, all states had repealed the legislation allowing for the removal of Aboriginal children under the policy of 'protection'. In the following years, Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies ('AICCAs') are set up to contest removal applications and provide alternatives to the removal of Indigenous children from their families.

1975

The Commonwealth Government passes the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*.

1976

The *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act* is passed by the Commonwealth Parliament in 1976. It provides recognition of Aboriginal land ownership, granting land rights to 11,000 Aboriginal people and enabling other Aboriginal people to lodge a claim for recognition of traditional ownership of their lands.

1980

Link-Up (NSW) Aboriginal Corporation is established. It is followed by Link-Up (Brisbane) in 1984, Link-Up (Darwin) in 1989, Link-Up (Tas) in 1991, Link-Up (Vic) in 1992, Link-Up (SA) in 1999, Link-Up (Alice Springs) in 2000, and Link-Up (WA – seven sites) in 2001. Link-Up provides family tracing, reunion and support for forcibly removed children and their families.

1981

Secretariat of the National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) established. SNAICC represents the interests on a national level of Australia's 100 or so Indigenous community-controlled children's service organisations.

1983

The Aboriginal Child Placement Principle, developed principally due to the efforts of Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies ('AICCAs') during the 1970s, is incorporated in NT welfare legislation to ensure that Indigenous children are placed with Indigenous families when adoption or fostering is necessary. This is followed in NSW (1987), Victoria (1989), South Australia (1993), Queensland and the ACT (1999), Tasmania (2000) and Western Australia (2006).

1987

Northern Territory elections are held and for the first time voting is compulsory for Aboriginal people.

1988

The Bicentennial of British Settlement in Australia takes place. Thousands of Indigenous people and supporters march through the streets of Sydney to celebrate cultural and physical survival.

1991

The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation is set up, funded by the Commonwealth Government. Parliament noted that there had not been a formal process of reconciliation to date, 'and that it was most desirable that there be such a reconciliation' by 2001.

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody presents its report to the Commonwealth Government. It finds that of the 99 deaths it investigated, 43 were of people who were separated from their families as children.

1992

The High Court of Australia hands down its landmark decision in *Mabo v Queensland*. It decides that native title exists over particular kinds of lands – unalienated Crown Lands, national parks and reserves – and that Australia was never *terra nullius* or empty land.

1993

International Year of Indigenous People.

The Commonwealth Government passes the *Native Title Act 1993*. This law allows Indigenous people to make land claims under certain circumstances. Claims cannot be made on freehold land (privately-owned land).

The position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner is established within the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC). The Commissioner's role is to monitor and report to the Commonwealth Parliament on the human rights of Indigenous Australians.

1994

The *Going Home* Conference in Darwin brings together over 600 Aboriginal people removed as children to discuss common goals of access to archives, compensation, rights to land and social justice.

1995

The *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* is established by the Commonwealth Government in response to efforts made by key Indigenous agencies and communities.

1996

The High Court hands down the *Wik* decision concerning land which is, or has been, subject to pastoral leases.

1997

HREOC presents *Bringing them home*, its report on the findings of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families, to the Commonwealth Government.

The parliaments and governments of Victoria, Tasmania, ACT, New South Wales, South Australia and Western Australia all issue statements recognising and publicly apologising to the 'Stolen Generations'.

1998

HREOC releases the Social Justice Report 1998, which includes a summary of responses from the churches, and non-Indigenous communities to the Inquiry's recommendations as well as an Implementation Progress Report.

The Commonwealth Government amends the *Native Title Act*. This restricts the way in which native title can be claimed.

National Archives Australia – *Bringing them home* indexing project is launched. The project is focussed on the identification and preservation of Commonwealth records related to Indigenous people and communities.

1999

Federal Parliament passes a motion of 'deep and sincere regret over the removal of Aboriginal children from their parents'.

Mandatory sentencing in Western Australia and the Northern Territory becomes a national issue. Many call for these laws to be overturned because they have greater impact on Indigenous children than on non-Indigenous children.

2000

The People's Walk for Reconciliation on 28 May occurs in state / territory capitals throughout Australia.

Australia appears before the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. The Committee criticises the Commonwealth Government's inadequate response to recommendations from *Bringing them home*.

Inquiry into the Federal Government's Implementation of the Recommendations made by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission in *Bringing them home* undertaken by the Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee.

Final report of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation presented to the Prime Minister and the Commonwealth Parliament.

2001

The Northern Territory Government repeals its mandatory sentencing laws.

The Northern Territory Government presents a parliamentary motion of apology to people who were removed from their families.

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission & Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC) hold the *Moving Forward Conference*. The conference aims to explore ways of providing reparations to Indigenous people forcibly removed from their families.

2002

The *Social Justice Report 2001* and *Native Title Report 2001* are presented to Commonwealth Parliament. Both reports express serious concerns about the nation's progress in achieving Indigenous rights.

PIAC releases *Restoring Identity – the follow up report to the Moving Forward Conference*. The report presents a proposal for a reparations tribunal.

Inquiry into the Progress Towards National Reconciliation undertaken by the Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee.

The National Sorry Day Committee releases the Parliamentary Seminar Report: *Are we bringing them home?* The Report surveys the progress in the implementation of the *Bringing them home* recommendations.

National Library of Australia Oral History Project, *Many Voices: Reflections on Experience of Indigenous Child Separation* published.

The first member of the 'Stolen Generations' is awarded compensation in the NSW Victims Compensation Tribunal for the sexual assault and injuries she suffered after authorities removed her from her family.

As part of the Victorian Government's response to *Bringing them home*, Victoria establishes a Stolen Generations Taskforce.

2003

The Ministerial Council for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (MCATSIA) commissions and releases an independent evaluation of government and non-government responses to the *Bringing them home* Report.

The Aboriginal and Social Justice Commissioner publicly criticises the failure of governments to provide financial and social reparations for members of the Stolen Generation, a national apology, or the appropriate mechanisms for individuals that were forcibly removed to reconnect with their culture.

2004

The Commonwealth Government establishes a memorial to the 'Stolen Generations' at Reconciliation Place in Canberra.

461 'Sorry Books' recording the thoughts of Australians on the unfolding history of the Stolen Generations are inscribed on the Australian Memory of the World Register, part of UNESCO's programme to protect and promote documentary material with significant historical value.

2005

The organisation 'Stolen Generations Victoria' is set up as a result of the 2003 report of the Stolen Generations taskforce. Its purpose is to establish a range of support and referral services that will assist 'Stolen Generation' peoples to reconnect with their family, community, culture and land.

The National Sorry Day Committee announces that in 2005, Sorry Day will be a 'National Day of Healing for All Australians' in an attempt to better engage the non-Indigenous Australian community with the plight of the 'Stolen Generations'.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) is dismantled by the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Amendment Act 2005* (Cth) and replaced by a Commonwealth Government appointed advisory board.

The first official Sorry Day ceremony outside Australia is hosted in Lincoln Fields, London, on 25 May 2005.

Volume two of the Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey is released. The report says that 12.3% of the carers of Indigenous children aged 0-17 in Western Australia were forcibly removed from their families. Compared with other Indigenous children, the children of members of the Stolen Generations are twice as likely to have emotional and behavioural problems, to be at high risk for hyperactivity, emotional and conduct disorders, and twice as likely to abuse alcohol and drugs.

The United Nations Commission on Human Rights passes Resolution 2005/35 that adopts the Van Boven / Bassiouni Principles. These principles declare a right to a remedy and reparation for victims of gross violations of international human rights law and serious violations of international humanitarian law.

2006

The first Stolen Generations compensation scheme in Australia is set up in Tasmania by the *Stolen Generations of Aboriginal Children Act 2006* (Tas).