

Late 20th century history

1. 1970

Some people from Maningrida in the Northern Territory, left and went back to a preferred way of life on their home estates. These estates were called 'outstations' and later 'homeland centres'. By 1972 many people had moved back to their traditional homelands.

Aboriginal Medical Service formed in Redfern.

Limited land lease rights are given to Aboriginal people on Northern Territory reserves.

2. 1971

Aboriginal Flag is designed by Luritja artist Harold Thomas and flown for the first time in Adelaide.

Evonne Cawley, an Aboriginal tennis player, receives the **Australian of the Year award**. ⇒ [Famous Aboriginal people](#)

Noonkanbah station workers walk off.

Gumatj Elders Millrrpum and others take on Nabalco Pty Ltd and the federal government in the Gove Land Rights Case following on from the Bark Petition. The Northern Territory Supreme Court ruled that Aboriginal people did not, under Australian law own the Arnhem Land reserve. This meant Nabalco could mine the land.

Jack Charles and Bob Maza found the **first Aboriginal theatre company** *Nindethana*.

Larrakia people 'sit-in' at Bagot Road, Darwin as a protest against theft of their land.

Queensland Aborigines Act is passed. Under it some legal restrictions for Aboriginal people living on reserves are maintained. Aboriginal cultural customs are banned and reading matter, mail, recreation, and marital and sexual relationships are censored. Their work and wage worth can be decreased and their movements recorded.

NSW Aboriginal Legal Service is formed, followed by Aboriginal pre-school, Black Theatre and the **Aboriginal Housing Company**.

Neville Bonner become the first Aboriginal member of Parliament when he filled a casual Senate vacancy. In 1972 he is elected on the Liberal Party ticket in Queensland.

Evonne Goolagong wins Wimbledon Women's Singles title.

Aboriginal people are **counted in the Census** for the first time.

Principals of schools in New South Wales are no longer able to exclude Aboriginal children because of home conditions or community opposition.

Dennis Walker and Sam Watson open the first and only ever Australian chapter of the **Black Panther Party** (an anti-racism left wing US organisation) in Brisbane. They monitor police activity and the amount of young black men vs. young white men taken into the prison system for the same crime. The party ceased in 1973 [4].

We followed Aboriginal defendants through – recording and comparing the sentencing trends so we could show that Aboriginal people were the most overarrested and overincarcerated people in the entire Australian community.—Sam Watson, Aboriginal activist [4]

November: During the ‘Smash The Acts campaign’ dozens of Aboriginal people march in Sydney in protest of the protectionist acts which regulate many aspects of their lives.

1. 1972

Self-determination (self-management) policy

January - July: The ‘**Aboriginal Tent Embassy**’ is pitched outside Parliament House in Canberra, demonstrating for land rights.

14 July: National Aborigines Day there are Australia wide strikes and marches by Aboriginal people.

23 August: NSW Director-General of Education approved the removal of the section of the teachers’ handbook that allowed school principals the right to refuse enrolment to Aboriginal children because of home conditions or substantial opposition from the community.

Aboriginal Heritage Protection Act is proclaimed in Western Australia.

The Whitlam government abolishes White Australia Policy and introduces a **policy of self-determination**. The change means having the right to cultural and linguistic maintenance and management of natural resources on Aboriginal land.

October: 1,000 Aboriginal people sign the Larrakia petition, one of the most important documents in the history of their struggle for land rights.

December: The Department of Aboriginal Affairs was established by the Whitlam Government. By 1975 offices had been established in all states and only Queensland had not transferred to the department all major responsibilities for Aboriginal policy and administration.

December: The Whitlam Government freezes all applications for mining and exploration on Commonwealth Aboriginal reserves.

Community controlled **Aboriginal Medical Service** is set up in Redfern, Sydney. The first in Australia.

Bruce McGuinness and Martin Bartfeld shoot *Blackfire* which focuses on Aboriginal communities in Melbourne.

It is **the first film known to have been made by an Aboriginal Australian**.

After having been in effect for over 70 years, the government announces that **the White Australia policy has ended**.

When migration began here on January 26th 1788 all Australians were black and the first migrants were white and not very well selected I might say.—Al Grassby, Minister for Immigration 1972-1974 [3]

2. 1973

Mr Justice Woodward of the Aboriginal Land Commission delivers his first report, showing the way for a new approach to Aboriginal Land Rights.

The Whitlam government introduces the first Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA), employing Aboriginal people for Aboriginal issues. The DAA begins a national program to improve the health and health services of Aboriginal people. It also introduces the first national body elected by Aboriginal people, the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee (NACC), although its main role is advisory only.

The National Aboriginal Consultative Committee is set up to advise the federal government on Aboriginal affairs. Aboriginal people elect the members.

The NSW Aboriginal Land Trust is set up to receive freehold ownership of former Aboriginal reserves.

3. 1974

Second Report of the Aboriginal Land Commission (**The Woodward Report**) is tabled, acknowledging Aboriginal people's link with the land; *'to deny Aborigines the right to prevent mining on their land is to deny the reality of their land rights'*. His report is accepted in principle by all political parties and most states.

A Commonwealth Act establishes the Aboriginal Land Fund Commission to buy land for Aboriginal corporate groups. Since then many properties have been acquired throughout Australia. The fund was replaced by the ADC (Aboriginal Development Council) in 1980.

4. 1975

1 June: Racial Discrimination Act is passed in the Federal Parliament. The Australian Senate unanimously endorses a resolution put up by Senator Neville Bonner acknowledging prior ownership of this country and seeking compensation for their dispossession.

The **National Aboriginal and Islander Health Organisation** is set up.

Gurindji people receive leasehold title to some of their traditional land (Wave Hill Station) in the Northern Territory.

The Laverton Royal Commission in Western Australia investigating clashes between police and Aboriginal people at Laverton and Skull Creek in December, 1974 and January, 1975, found that police were unable to justify arrests and that some parts of the police story had been invented. The Premier, Sir Charles Court, dismissed the report as "a waste of money".

Ranger Uranium and Environmental Inquiry examines the effects of mining on Aboriginal people.

White Australia immigration policy ends.

5. 1976

Establishment of the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG).

Commonwealth Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act implements the main recommendations of the Woodward Report. The most significant land rights legislation in Australia, the act transfers reserve land to Aboriginal ownership (around 11,000 people) and administration to Land Councils. It gives statutory recognition to the Northern Land Council and the Pitjantjajara Land Council is formed.

Census establishes national Indigenous population at 160,000.

Three Land Councils are founded and an office of Aboriginal Land Commissioners is created.

Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency is established, rapidly achieving a 40% reduction in the number of Aboriginal children in children's homes. It is followed by the South Australian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (1978), Karu in Darwin (1979) and the Western Australian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (1980).

In first claim under the Act, Mr Justice Fox, who ran the Ranger Uranium and Environmental Inquiry recommends that traditional owners in the Alligator River region be granted land. Mining and tourism continue to operate in the area.

Pat O'Shane graduates from UNSW, becoming the first Aboriginal person to be admitted to the Bar.

6. 1977

NSW Anti-Discrimination Act comes into force.

NSW Land Council is established by Aboriginal people in Sydney.

Aboriginal woman Isobel Coe received \$100 in damages in the Moree District Court, NSW against Malcolm Barber who refused her entrance to his bar.

The first Land Claim hearing to Crown land at Borroloola commences.

National Trachoma and Eye Health Program finds that of 60,000 Aboriginal people examined, more than half have trachoma. The infect rate is as high as 80 percent in some areas.

7. 1978

Pat O'Shane becomes the first Aboriginal law graduate and barrister.

Galarwuy Yunupingu, a leader of the Yolngu tribe in the Northern Territory, receives the **Australian of the Year award**. ⇒ [Famous Aboriginal people](#)

The **Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Ordinance** is passed, instituting prosecution for trespass and desecration of Aboriginal sites.

Health statistics show that 48 in every 1,000 Aboriginal babies in NT die before reaching 1 year of age. This compares to 1 baby in every 1000 in the white population. Of the 6000 Aboriginal children living in Sydney 4000 are underweight. Leprosy still occurs in the Aboriginal populations and alcohol is a serious problem.

Land titles are granted to 15 Aboriginal Land Trusts in the Northern Territory.

Western Australian Government agrees that some of the money earned by mining land held by the Aboriginal Lands Trusts "would go to the Aborigines".

3 November: The Northern Land Council and Commonwealth Government signed the **Ranger uranium mining agreement**.

8. 1979

In "**Coe vs Commonwealth**", Coe is unsuccessful in challenging the legal concept that Australia had been an uninhabited land which had been settled not conquered.

By 1979 NSW Land Trust had gained 144 properties, all former Aboriginal reserves.

June: The Western Australian Supreme Court grants an injunction against the American-based Amax company which want to explore Noonkanbah for oil. Test drilling finally goes ahead despite Aboriginal resistance which is supported by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people across Australia. In 2007 Aboriginal people win native title rights over land including the station.

National Aboriginal Conference resolves that a treaty should be concluded between Aboriginal people and the Commonwealth Government.

The first Aboriginal parliamentarian, **Neville Bonner**, receives the **Australian of the Year award**. ⇒ [Famous Aboriginal people](#)

9. 1980

The Pitjantjatjara Council advises the Aboriginal Affairs Minister of the possible **radioactive contamination of Aboriginal people** at Wallatina Station, South Australia as a result of atomic tests. The 'Black Mist' of 1953 is brought to public attention with symptoms of sight loss and skin rashes being reported. A number of Aboriginal people die as a result of the British atomic tests and up to 1,000 are directly affected.

Link-Up (NSW) Aboriginal Corporation established. Followed by Link-Up (Qld) in 1988, 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 ([Stolen Generations](#)).

Dispute at Noonkanbah, Western Australia, over drilling on sacred sites draws national and international attention to Aboriginal rights.

Jim Hagan is the first Australian Aboriginal person to **address the United Nations in Geneva** taking Indigenous matters to the international stage when the Fraser government fails to stop mining on sacred sites on Noonkanbah Station, about 300kms west of Broome, NT.

10. 1981

Pitjantjatjara people of South Australia are granted land under the **Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act (SA)**. A large area of the state is returned to the Anangu Pitjantjatjara. Anangu Pitjantjatjara, a corporate body, is established to administer some 100,000km of land for the Anangu people.

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

Michael Anderson, one of the founders of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, becomes the **first Aboriginal Australian to address the United Nations**.

11. 1982

Victorian Premier Cain announces legislation is to be passed recognising the Aboriginal ownership of the Framlingham Forest near Warrnambool.

Aboriginal people at the Hermannsburg mission are granted freehold title.

October: Queensland Aboriginal people protest at the Commonwealth Games.

Northern Land Council sign an agreement with the Pan-Continental mining company allowing the company to mine uranium at Jabiluka.

Death of Joe Pat in [Roebourne gaol](#) (WA). The first death in custody to be widely protested and eventually leads to the setting up of the Muirhead enquiry.

Mark Ella named Australian of the Year.

Eddie Mabo commences proceedings in the High Court of Australia.

Ken Colbung, a Nyoongar Aboriginal activist from Western Australia, receives the Order of Australia Medal for his services to the Aboriginal community. Ken was heavily involved in Aboriginal politics and the main architect of the Aboriginal Heritage Protection Act which came into force in 1972 [1].

12. 1983

Aboriginal Land Rights Act (NSW) recognises dispossession and dislocation of NSW Aboriginal people, sets up local-regional-State land council network with land tax funding as compensation.

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).

13. 1984

End of various "protection acts", which had existed since 1897 in Queensland. Under these laws Aboriginal people were effectively slave labourers; the wages for their labour were stolen by the State or never even claimed by the State from the employers. The issue of reparation is still unresolved.

Lowitja O'Donoghue, a pioneering nurse and future ATSIC chairperson, receives the **Australian of the Year award**. ⇒ [Famous Aboriginal people](#)

14. 1985

In the 'Come to Canberra Campaign' joint land councils from the Northern Territory and the States go to Parliament House, Canberra to **protest against the proposed changes to the Aboriginal Land Rights Act** of the Northern Territory and the inadequate provisions in Hawke's visions of 'Uniform National Land Rights'.

Commonwealth Government **returns Uluru Kata-Tjuta National Park** (including Uluru/Ayer's Rock) to its traditional Aboriginal owners.

There were dire warnings that the rock belonged to everyone and fears that it would be taken away by Aboriginal people. As you can see, the rock is still here, people got their land rights and the sky hasn't fallen down.—Gina Smith, Central Land Council, NT [2]

The Pitjantjatjara council makes an agreement with Amoco Petroleum for exploration on 20 000 square kilometres of their land.

15. 1986

November 29th

Pope John Paul II addresses the Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders in Blatherskite Park in Alice Springs.

The 'Goondiwindi riot' between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents of Goondiwindi on New South Wales - Queensland border leads to public acknowledgment of poor living standards and low socio-economic expectations of Aboriginal people in the area.

16. 1987

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

A **Royal Commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody** begins in response to high rate of Aboriginal incarceration and deaths.

Imparja Television Company receives the first TV Broadcasting license issued to an Aboriginal organisation.

'Goondiwindi riot' results in the first public inquiry for the new HREOC - the Toomelah Inquiry which investigates the wider causes of racial conflict in New South Wales and Queensland border towns of Toomelah, Boggabilla and Goondiwindi. Significant resources are allocated to meet basic housing, water, health and education needs.

17. 1988

26 January: Tens of thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people march through the streets of Sydney on Australia Day to celebrate their survival during the previous 200 years, while non-indigenous Australia commemorates the bicentenary of their immigration. Aboriginal people rename the day to '**Survival Day**'.

Barunga Statement. Prime Minister Hawke affirms that the Government is committed to work for a negotiated Treaty with Aboriginal People.

Second Aboriginal cricket team tours England.

Human Rights Commission reports that conditions at Toomelah and Boggabilla settlements are worse than third world countries.

Australia's representative to the United Nations Human Rights Committee acknowledges 'public policy regarding the care of Aboriginal children, particularly during the postwar period, had been a serious mistake'.

Justice Muirhead presents interim report on Black Deaths in Custody.

High Court judgment affirms power of Commonwealth Racial Discrimination Act over discriminatory state based legislation. The Court hands down decision on a **claim by Mer people for native title rights to the Murray Islands**. It allows the original claim to be heard, which the Queensland Government had attempted to block through introducing retrospective legislation abolishing land rights.

18. 1989

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) is established as main Commonwealth agency in Indigenous affairs.

19. 1991

The **Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation** is set up, funded by the federal government, with cross-party support. The 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 and Recommendations’ to the Federal Government. It finds that of the 99 deaths it investigated, 43 were of people who were separated from their families as children.

Legislation providing for land rights in Queensland are passed - the Aboriginal Land Act 1991 and the Torres Strait Land Act 1991. They are greatly inferior to the standard set by the Northern Territory legislation.

The Upper House in Tasmania rejects land rights legislation for Aboriginal people.

20. 1992

The High Court of Australia hands down its landmark decision in *Mabo v Queensland (Mabo Case, **Mabo Decision**)*. 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.

Torres Strait Islander flag designed.

Minister for Aboriginal Affairs invokes the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Act to protect women’s sites near Alice Springs, threatened by a dam proposed by the Northern Territory Government.

The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation issues its Strategic Plan for the next three years.

Mandawuy Yunupingu, leader of the Aboriginal band Yothu Yindi, receives the **Australian of the Year award**. ⇒ [Famous Aboriginal people](#)

26 January The first **Survival Day** concert is held in Sydney.

10 December: **Prime Minister Keating’s Redfern Speech** at the launch of the International Year of the Indigenous People acknowledged past wrongs.

21. 1993

International Year of Indigenous People.

The federal government passes the **Native Title Act 1993**. This law allows Indigenous people to make land claims under certain situations. They cannot make claims on freehold land (privately-owned land).

30 June: The Wik Peoples make a claim for native title in the Federal Court of Australia for land on the Cape York Peninsula in Queensland. Native Title Act does not pass through Parliament until December 1993.

September: In a first for *Vogue*, Aboriginal model **Elaine George** of Brisbane becomes the **cover girl** for the September issue

of *Vogue Australia* 1993, leading to a career as an international model. Elaine was discovered as a 17 year old at Dreamworld, a Gold Coast amusement park, by freelance photographer Grant Good.

The issue became the highest selling *Vogue* in the then 34 year history of Australian *Vogue*.

22. 1994

1 January: Native Title Act 1993 becomes law.

Native Title Tribunal is established to hear land claims. Indigenous Land Fund is established as part of federal government’s response to the Mabo decision.

Going Home Conference, 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.

9 August: The UNs General Assembly mark this day as the **International Day of the Worlds Indigenous People**.

23. 1995

29 January: Justice Drummond in the Federal Court makes a decision that the claim of the Wik and Thayorre Peoples could not succeed over the areas that were subject to pastoral leases. The Judge's reason was that he considered that the grant of pastoral leases under Queensland law extinguished any native title rights. The Wik and Thayorre peoples appeal to the High Court.

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

June: The Australian Government proclaims the Aboriginal flag as an official 'Flag of Australia' under section 5 of the Flags Act 1953.

24. 1996

29 July: Aboriginal sprinter **Cathy Freeman wins a silver medal** in the 400 metres run at the Atlanta Olympics, USA, and Nova Peris-Kneebone becomes the **first Aboriginal person to win a gold medal**.

September: The Jawoyn people in the Katherine region of the Northern Territory sign on to the largest single commercial deal in Australian history involving Aboriginal interests. The signing is a major expansion of Aboriginal involvement in the Pegasus Mt Todd Gold Mine.

23 December: The **Wik Decision** - the High Court reversed Justice Drummond's judgement. The High Court found that pastoral leases did not necessarily extinguish native title and that both could co-exist but where there was a conflict native title rights were subordinate to the rights of the pastoral lease holder. The federal government develops 'Ten Point Plan' outlining a proposed legislative response to the High Court Wik decision, with the aim of limiting Aboriginal land rights.

Northern Territory and Western Australia pass mandatory sentencing laws which affect particularly Aboriginal youths.

Pauline Hanson and her **One Nation Party** campaign against Aboriginal 'special treatment'.

Australia's first Aboriginal judge, Robert 'Bob' Bellear is sworn in as a New South Wales District Court judge. Bellear dies on 14 March 2005, aged 60.

1. 1997

Reconciliation policy

March: Hamersley Iron and the Gumala Aboriginal Corporation finalise a unique regional land use agreement making the way of the \$500 million Yandicoogina iron ore mine in the Pilbara region of Western Australia. The agreement was the result of 20 months of consultation and negotiation.

10 March: Alcan South Pacific Pty Ltd enters into a detailed Heads of Agreement with the Aboriginal community in Weipa, Cape York, for a proposed bauxite mining and shipping operation from Alspac's existing mining lease at Ely, north of Weipa.

26 May: The 700-page report of the 'Stolen Children' National Inquiry '**Bringing Them Home**', is tabled in Federal Parliament. The report concludes that the forcible removal of children was an **act of genocide**, contrary to United Nations Convention on Genocide, ratified by Australia in 1949. Australians are shocked by the report's details.

27 May: During the opening address of the **Reconciliation Convention** Premier Minister John Howard refers to the plight of Australia's Aboriginal people as a mere 'blemish', dismissing centuries of dispossession and violence as insignificant. Indigenous delegates in the audience stand and turn their backs on the Prime Minister in protest. The PM snaps and screams at the audience in return.

In facing the realities of the past, [...] we must not join those who would portray Australia's history since 1788 as little more than a disgraceful record of imperialism [...] such an approach will be repudiated by the overwhelming majority of Australians who are proud of what this country has achieved although inevitably acknowledging the blemishes in its past history.—Then-Prime Minister John Howard

April - May: In response to the Wik decision the federal government under Howard develops its 10 Point Plan as the basis for amending the Native Title Act 1993. These amendments are introduced in the Spring Session (September 1997) of the Commonwealth Parliament.

2. 1998

January: Australians for Native Title (ANT) launches the **Sorry Books campaign** where Australians can sign who want to do something in response to the federal government's refusal to make a formal apology to the [Stolen Generations](#).

26 May: One year after the *Bringing Them Home* report the first **Sorry Day** is marked by hundreds of activities around the country. The Australian federal government does not take part in 'Sorry Day', saying people who removed Aboriginal children thought they were doing the right thing and people now should not have to say sorry for what people did in the past. Over 1 million signatures in thousands of Sorry Books speak a different language.

The federal government makes amendments to the Native Title Act. Under these changes, protection of native title is reduced.

Federal election results in a **second Aboriginal person elected** to Federal Parliament - Senator **Aden Ridgeway**. He is to remain a Democrats Senator for New South Wales until 2005, the only Aboriginal person serving in the Australian Parliament during that time.

Aboriginal athlete and Olympic gold medallist **Cathy Freeman receives the Australian of the Year award**. ⇒ [Famous Aboriginal people](#)

3. 1999

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.

Federal Parliament issues a **statement of sincere regret** over the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families.