



Indigenous participation in parliament

1. There have only been two Indigenous Senators in 109 years of Federal Parliament and one Indigenous politician in the House of Representatives.

Neville Bonner was the first Aboriginal person to sit in Federal Parliament as a Senator for Queensland from 1971 until 1983. Neville Bonner was born on Ukerbagh Island in the Tweed River in New South Wales. He was a member of the Liberal Party. Aden Ridgeway was the second Aboriginal person to sit in Federal Parliament as a Senator for New South Wales from 1999 until 2005 and was a member of the Australian Democrats.

On 24 August 2010, Kenneth George Wyatt became the first Indigenous member of the House of Representatives when he narrowly won the West Australian seat of Hasluck for the Liberal Party. Wyatt had held a position in indigenous health and education agencies for many years before his election. In his maiden speech, Wyatt received a standing ovation. During his speech, he said 'It is with deep and mixed emotion that I, as an Aboriginal man with Noongar, Yamitji and Wongi heritage, stand before you and the members of the House of Representatives as an equal'.¹

Outside of Federal Parliament, there have been a number of Indigenous representatives at a state and local government level, such as Neville Perkins, Linda Burney, Marion Scrymgeour and Ben Wyatt—to name a few.

2. Nova Peris has become the first Indigenous woman to be elected to the Federal Parliament.

Nova Peris OAM is Labor's candidate for the Senate in the Northern Territory.

She is a traditional owner/descendent of and identifies with the Kiga People of the East Kimberley, Yawuru People of the West Kimberley (Broome) and Muran People of West Arnhem land NT.

Nova was born and raised in Darwin and her mother, grandmother and grandfather are all members of the 'Stolen Generations' from respective missions on the Tiwi islands, Moola Bulla of the East Kimberley and Beagle Bay of the West Kimberley.

Known to many Australians for her sporting achievements, she was the first Indigenous Australian, and first Territorian, to win a Gold Medal. Nova played

¹ <http://collection.moadoph.gov.au/objects/2011-1787/>

in the Australian Women's Hockey team at the 1996 Summer Olympics, and became a double gold medalist in the 1998 Commonwealth Games. She is the only person ever to make back-to-back Olympic finals in two different sports.

3. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander candidates represent the interests of all people, not just the issues affecting Indigenous people.

Because I am an Aboriginal doesn't mean that I am going to Canberra to represent the Aboriginal people wholly and solely. I am a Queenslander and I will be representing Queensland, and my loyalties will be to the people of Queensland.

Neville Bonner, First Aboriginal Senator.

Issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have deep significance for Australia as a nation, and it is important to have strong advocates and leaders in Federal Parliament to address these issues. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people share the same hospitals, schools and workplaces as other Australians and as both voters and candidates they will draw on these shared experiences when helping to shape Australia's government.

In addition, for Indigenous candidates, being Indigenous is only one of many valuable life experiences that they can offer as leaders. For example, Ken Wyatt, Liberal candidate for Hasluck, has a strong background in both health and education. Glenice Smith, Greens candidate from Hasluck, has more than 15 years experience in the crime prevention and social justice sectors. Sharon Firebrace, Socialist Alliance candidate for the Victorian Senate, has a strong business background as one of the founding directors of the Australian Council of Businesswomen.

4. Having Indigenous people in parliament can help to achieve reconciliation and close the gap.

Reconciliation and closing the gap are about creating a shared future for all Australians, where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are given the same respect and have the same opportunities to live a good and healthy life as other Australians. A shared future calls for genuine inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in all aspects of Australian life, including parliamentary representation. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people bring a unique and valuable contribution to parliaments and political debates. As elected officials they work side by side with other Australians to shape our future together.

5. Indigenous politicians can bring important experience and expertise to bear on government decisions and policies which affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

As a general rule, government decisions are most effective where they are made in consultation with the people who will be affected by these decisions. Every year, hundreds of decisions and policies affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are made by the Federal Government. Indigenous politicians can bring important experience and expertise to bear on government decisions and policies which affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. For example, Greens candidate Warren H Williams points out that, 'I'm smack, bang, right in the middle of everything the government brought in like the intervention...all the stuff in Australian news is happening in my neighbourhood.'

6. Australia's first Indigenous head of government

Adam Graham Giles is an Australian politician who has been the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory since March 2013 and is Australia's first Indigenous head of government.²

Adam Giles is a Kamiliaroi man. His father was a Romer, and his grandmother was a Ruttley.

Giles cut his teeth in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, before moving to Canberra to the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations.

Giles won Braitling easily in August 2008, and again in 2012. He was the first Aboriginal person to do so.

In ascending to the Chief Ministership, it's now well known that Giles holds the honour of being the first Aboriginal Australian to lead a government. That's no mean feat, and an important one for the history books.³

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adam_Giles

³ <http://tracker.org.au/2013/04/the-rise-of-adam-giles/>