

# Reconciliation News

Stories about Australia's journey to equality and unity



NRW 2021  
POSTER  
INSIDE!

## TAKING ACTION FROM SAFE TO BRAVE

NATIONAL RECONCILIATION WEEK EDITION

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**RECONCILIATION**  
AUSTRALIA

*Reconciliation News is published by Reconciliation Australia in May and October each year. Its aim is to inform and inspire readers with stories relevant to the ongoing reconciliation process between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians.*

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Reconciliation Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to Elders past and present.

Reconciliation Australia is an independent, not-for-profit organisation promoting reconciliation by building relationships, respect and trust between the wider Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Visit [reconciliation.org.au](https://reconciliation.org.au) to find out more.

**Cover image:** Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Parade participants highlight the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have died in custody since the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. This number has increased since this photo was taken in March 2021. Photo: Joseph Mayers.



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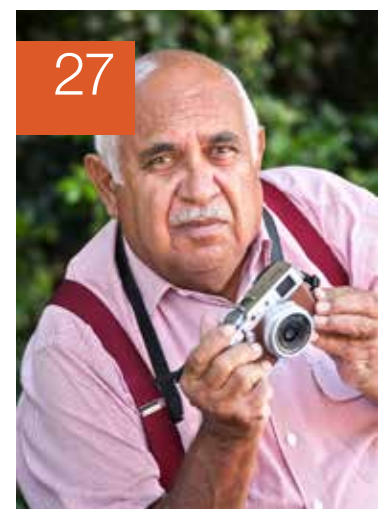
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# RECONCILIATION RECAP

## SIX MONTHS IN REVIEW

2-3 December 2020

International Indigenous  
Governance Conference



The first International Indigenous Governance Conference (IIGC)—hosted by the Australian Indigenous Governance Institute in partnership with Reconciliation Australia and the BHP Foundation—attracted global attention with a powerhouse line-up of 30 international and local speakers.

Held virtually and themed *Self-Determination through Self-Governance*, participants spoke of the inspiration provided by speakers who, had for many years, been at the frontline of nation-building and progressing self-determination. As one participant said, “It is so valuable to have these kernels of truth and authenticity carved from the real battlefields—and which have helped drag the country along to the necessary change.”

Read the full IIGC wrap-up at: [aigi.com.au](https://aigi.com.au)

*Shannon Ruska, of Tribal Experiences, began the IIGC broadcast with a formal Welcome to Country and smoking ceremony, acknowledging the Yuggera and Turrbal Peoples, the Traditional Owners of Meanjin (Brisbane). Photo: AIGI*

25 January 2021

Australian of the Year  
Awards breakfast



Reconciliation Australia hosted its annual celebratory breakfast for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander finalists of the 2021 Australian of the Year Awards. An impressive number of high-achievers made the final nominations: Dr Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr Baumann AM (NT), Stuart McGrath (NT), Dr Wendy Page (NT), Sergeant Erica Gibson (NT), Donna Stolzenberg (VIC), Tanya Hosch (SA), Aunty Patricia Anderson AO (ACT), Aunty Isabel Reid (NSW), Aunty McRose Elu (QLD) Professor Helen Milroy (WA) and Dr Richard Walley OAM (WA).

Reconciliation Australia CEO Karen Mundine and the Honourable Ken Wyatt MP Minister for Indigenous Australians congratulated the finalists and thanked them for their ongoing commitment in their fields. Dr Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann AM was announced the 2021 Senior Australian of the Year, giving a rousing acceptance speech: “We learnt to speak your English fluently, for years, we have walked on a one-way street to learn the white people’s way. I’ve learnt to walk in two worlds and live in towns and cities, and even worked in them. Now is the time for you to come closer to understand us and how we live.”

Go to [australianoftheyear.org.au](https://australianoftheyear.org.au) to learn more about the finalists

*The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nominees of the Australian of the Year Awards 2021, with the Honourable Ken Wyatt MP, Reconciliation Australia CEO and Co-Chair, Karen Mundine and Tom Calma AO. Photo: Salty Dingo*





## 25-31 January 2021

### From the Heart: Week of Action

From the Heart is an education project created to show Australians that an Indigenous Voice to Parliament enshrined in the constitution is fair, is practical, and that it is time that to make this change in the interests of our shared future.

The From the Heart Week of Action called upon all Australians to lend their voices in support of the aspirations in the Uluru Statement from the Heart, encouraging the public to digitally sign in support of the document, as well as make personalised submissions to the co-design process.

Support the Uluru Statement from the Heart here: [fromtheheart.com.au](https://fromtheheart.com.au)

## 23-25 February 2021

### National RAP Conference



The third National RAP Conference covered three core themes: *Anti-racism, Truth-telling and Ideas for Action*. More than 700 people registered for the virtual conference and are now part of the ongoing conference network. The conference's key feature was its networking platform, giving attendees access to on-demand content highlighting brave actions by RAP organisations, culminating with eight livestreamed interviews.

The guest speakers came from a wide range of corporate, education, local government, arts and not-for-profit organisations. While the virtual format was new to many, the options of events and guest speakers and the immediate access to current data and stats on the progress of reconciliation were highlighted as stand outs during the event.

Go to [reconciliation.org.au/reconciliation-action-plans](https://reconciliation.org.au/reconciliation-action-plans) to learn about future RAP events



Tens of thousands of Australian women and allies across the country marched against Australia's culture of gendered violence, harassment and abuse, particularly in the workplace. The marches reflected women's anger and disbelief in response to a wave of sexual assault allegations in the country's highest level of government—the Federal Parliament.

Consistently at the forefront of gender activism and resistance, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advocates and groups at the marches, brought attention to the fact First Nations women are more likely than their non-Indigenous peers to be the victims of gendered violence. Our Watch, a leading non-profit for the prevention of violence against women, says three in five Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have experienced sexual or physical violence by a male intimate partner and are 32 times more likely to be hospitalised due to assault. As Ngunnawal Elder, Auntie Violet Sheridan said at the march in front of Parliament House, "Women will not tolerate violence against other women."

Head to [ourwatch.org.au](https://ourwatch.org.au) for toolkits and resources on gendered violence

*First Nations women, including Senator Lidia Thorpe and Ngunnawal Elder Auntie Violet Sheridan, hold up placards saying '200+ years of violence against Blak women', at the March 4 Justice in Canberra. Photo: Karleen Minney*

# FROM THE CEO



CEO Karen Mundine. Photo: Joseph Mayers

2021 marks an important milestone in Australia's reconciliation journey: 30 years ago, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody presented its final report to the Australian Government and people.

The Commission was established due to rising public outcry and concern that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were dying in incarceration, in ways that could not be explained.

Ultimately, the report concluded that while First Nations Australians were not more likely to die in custody, they were, however, twenty times more likely to be incarcerated than non-Indigenous Australians were.

It is a direct result of that initial public outcry and advocacy that the Royal Commission continues to be the benchmark against which we still understand and contextualise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander incarceration today.

At marches and vigils across the country, the number chanted through megaphones, painted on t-shirts and held high above heads is known and accessible to us because of those in the beginning who bravely stepped forward and demanded an investigation.

Public action is critical and has the power to transform our knowledge, our circumstances and our nation, but it must be constant, and it must continue to hold our leaders and our systems accountable. At the time of writing, the two months since our cover photo was taken, there have been seven more Indigenous deaths in custody.

The final recommendation of the Royal Commission called for all political leaders to support a reconciliation process, which created the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation—Reconciliation Australia's predecessor. In the 30 years since then we have expanded that idea to call on all leaders across Australian society to support the process of reconciliation.

In Reconciliation Australia's 20th anniversary year, our theme is *More than a word. Reconciliation takes action*. It urges the reconciliation movement to braver more substantive action.

This theme acknowledges the findings of the *2021 State of Reconciliation in Australia report*, which found increasing knowledge in the Australian public about issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, but now, after two decades of Reconciliation Australia, this awareness must motivate us to braver action.

Edition 45 of Reconciliation News consequently brings you stories to help you reflect on this year's theme and consider what you can do this National Reconciliation Week (NRW) to move from safe to brave on issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Inside, you will find the official NRW poster, featuring artwork by Warumungu/Wombaya woman and owner of Nungala Creative, Jessica Johnson. We encourage you to celebrate and promote the week by displaying the poster in your communities and workplaces.

We bring you the story of the trailblazers of First Nations photography in Australia; as well as take a look at a new campaign, Learn Our Truth. Shelley Reys AO reflects on 20 years of Reconciliation Australia, and RAP Partner Transport for NSW tells us what it's like to look at the hard and uncomfortable truths of the places in which they operate. Historian Grace Karskens, in collaboration with Darug Traditional Owners and researchers, explains the importance of naming Country and the work they are doing to raise awareness of Darug presence and history in the wider community.

This National Reconciliation Week and beyond, we reflect on the path we've taken to this point and thank those who have walked with us. As we face the challenges of the next 20 years, I encourage all to engage, learn, speak up and take braver, more impactful actions to advance reconciliation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Karen'.

**Karen Mundine**  
Chief Executive Officer

# CALENDAR

## DAYS OF NOTE

**26**  
May 2021

National Sorry Day

**27 MAY -  
3 JUNE 2021**

National Reconciliation Week

**4-11**  
July 2021

NAIDOC Week

**4**  
August 2021

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day

**9**  
August 2021

International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples

**1**  
September 2021

Indigenous Literacy Day

## EVENTS

### AIATSIS Summit



31 May-4 June 2021

Co-convened with the South Australian Native Title Services and Kurna Yerta Aboriginal Corporation, the AIATSIS Summit provides a unique forum for academics, government, native title, legal experts and community sectors to collaborate, and opportunities to support and strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, knowledge and governance.

[aiatsis.gov.au/2021-summit](http://aiatsis.gov.au/2021-summit)

### 2021 NT Aboriginal Leadership and Governance Forum

3-4 June 2021

This two-day forum celebrates and acknowledges First Nations leadership and governance, while stimulating and inspiring self-determined leadership and governance by Aboriginal people, and will include a welcome reception, keynote presentations, masterclasses, panel discussions and networking events.

[cmc.gov.au](http://cmc.gov.au)

### Barunga Festival

11-13 June 2021

In 1988, Barunga was the site of First Nations leaders coming together and presenting Prime Minister Bob Hawke with the Barunga Statement which called for a treaty. Prime Minister Hawke signed the statement in his visit to the Festival but sadly, it was never brought before Parliament.

Yothu Yindi went on to write the worldwide hit 'Treaty' as a result of this gathering at the Barunga Festival. Barunga Festival today attracts a 4000-strong audience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous people from all over the world to camp and take part in a program of music, sport, traditional arts and cultural activities over the 3-day long weekend in June each year, welcomed by the Traditional Custodians of the Katherine region. The 2021 lineup is out soon.



First Nations dancers performing at Barunga Festival 2019. Photo: Duane Preston courtesy of Skinnyfish Music [barungafestival.com.au](http://barungafestival.com.au)

### NAIDOC Week



4-11 July 2021

The theme for NAIDOC Week 2021 is Heal Country!, which calls for all of us to continue to seek better protections for our lands, our waters, our sacred sites and our cultural heritage from exploitation, desecration and destruction. For generations, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been calling for stronger measures to recognise, protect, and maintain all aspects of our culture and heritage for all

Australians. NAIDOC stands for National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee. Its origins can be traced to the emergence of Aboriginal groups in the 1920s which sought to increase awareness in the wider community of the status and treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

[NAIDOC.org.au](http://NAIDOC.org.au)

### Garma Festival



30 July-2 August 2021

Hosted by the Yothu Yindi Foundation, Garma is a celebration of the cultural traditions of the Yolngu people. The 22nd annual Garma Festival will be a COVID-safe event with strict compliance measures in place to protect the health and safety of those on site. If you cannot attend this year, The Yothu Yindi Foundation is inviting submissions from across Australia for a pictorial gallery to be exhibited on the ceremonial grounds at Gulkula during this year's Garma. The exhibition, *Facing the Nation—Reflections on Indigenous Australia in 2021*, seeks to encapsulate the realities of life for First Nations people in Australia in 2021; who we are and where we are going.

[garmafestival.com.au](http://garmafestival.com.au)

The Reconciliation Australia women's group at Garma 2019. Photo: Melinda Cilento





# RECONCILIATION TAKES ACTION: NATIONAL RECONCILIATION WEEK 2021

**In 2021 we mark twenty years of Reconciliation Australia and almost three decades of Australia's formal reconciliation process. This year's National Reconciliation Week theme, *More than a word. Reconciliation takes action*, urges the reconciliation movement towards braver and more impactful action.**

The reconciliation movement is at a tipping point. The 2020 Black Lives Matter protests and growing numbers at Invasion Day rallies each year, show more people are understanding the truth and speaking up on issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The 2021 National Reconciliation Week (NRW) theme, *More than a word. Reconciliation takes action*, asks people to take this awareness and knowledge, and use it as a springboard to more substantive, brave action.

## **Moving from awareness to action**

For reconciliation to be effective, it must involve truth-telling, and actively address issues of inequality, systemic racism and instances where the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are ignored, denied or reduced.

According to the *2020 Australian Reconciliation Barometer* and the *2021 State of Reconciliation in Australia Report*, there is greater support for reconciliation than ever before.

Awareness of the complexity and magnitude of First Nations cultures and knowledges continues to grow; and many more Australians now understand the brutal impact that British colonialism and the modern Australian state have had on First Nations families and communities.

Regardless, we must be more determined than ever if we are to achieve the goals of the movement—a just, equitable, and reconciled nation.

As history tells us, this will only happen through continued and concerted action from those who are already part of the reconciliation movement to those who are yet to join.

## **NRW 2021 ARTWORK: ACTION**

The 2021 NRW graphics are drawn from the artwork *Action* by Jessica Johnson. A descendent of the Warumungu/Wombaya people north of Tennant Creek, Jessica is the owner of Nungala Creative, using her work to address issues of injustice and celebrate culture and people through her recognisably bright, positive and experimental aesthetic.



*NRW is a time for all Australians to learn about our shared histories, cultures, and achievements, and to explore and reflect on how each of us can contribute to reconciliation in Australia.*

*The dates for NRW remain the same each year; 27 May to 3 June. These dates commemorate two significant milestones in the reconciliation journey—the successful 1967 referendum, and the High Court Mabo decision respectively.*

In her words:

*The artwork reflects our connection and mutual obligation to one another, community and Country. Through commonality and difference, we have the ability to come together and achieve real change.*

*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples have been listening to the heart beat of the land and sea for generations. With their rainbow shaped souls the spirits ask for us to join and make reconciliation more than a word, take action. We need to love one another and every aspect of the existing environment and community—we all have a role to play.*

*We are the change.*

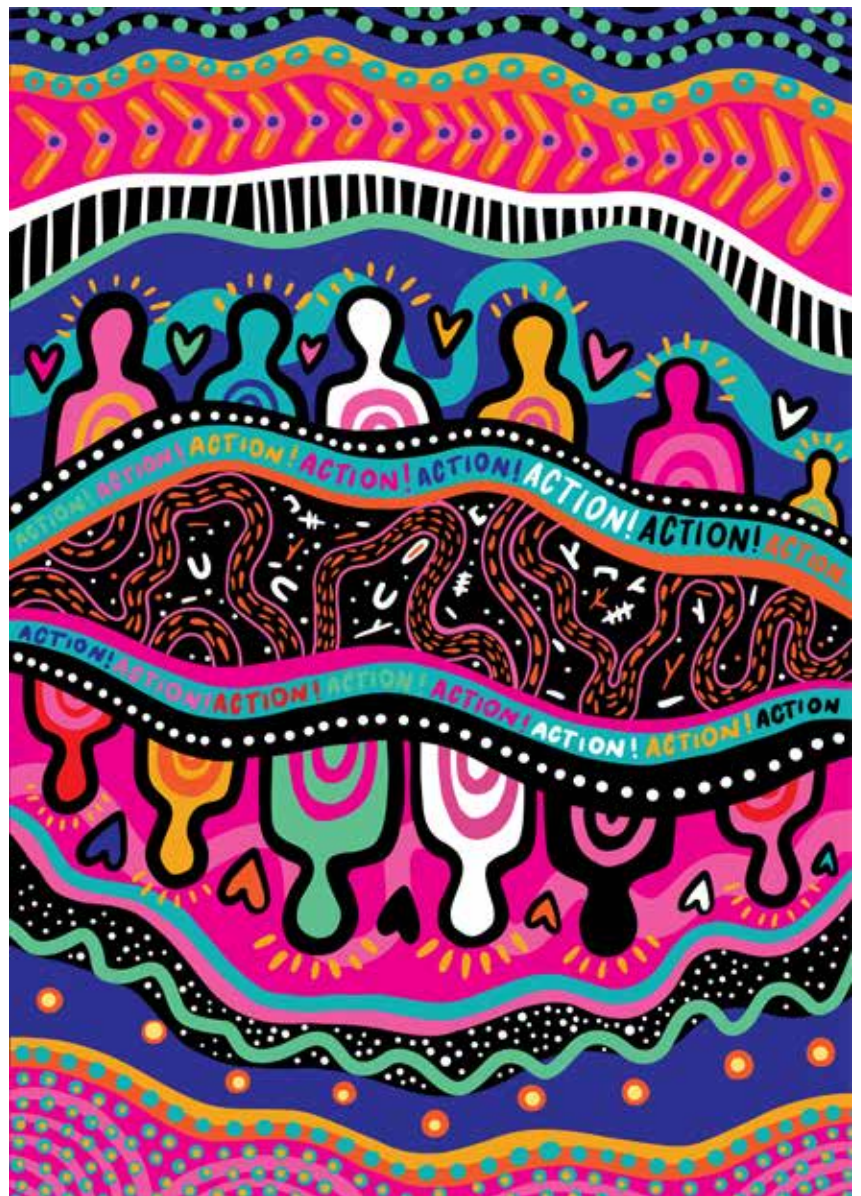
### Get involved

Head to [nrw.reconciliation.org.au](http://nrw.reconciliation.org.au) to download the NRW 2021 poster and find an NRW 2021 event in your area—or register to host your own!

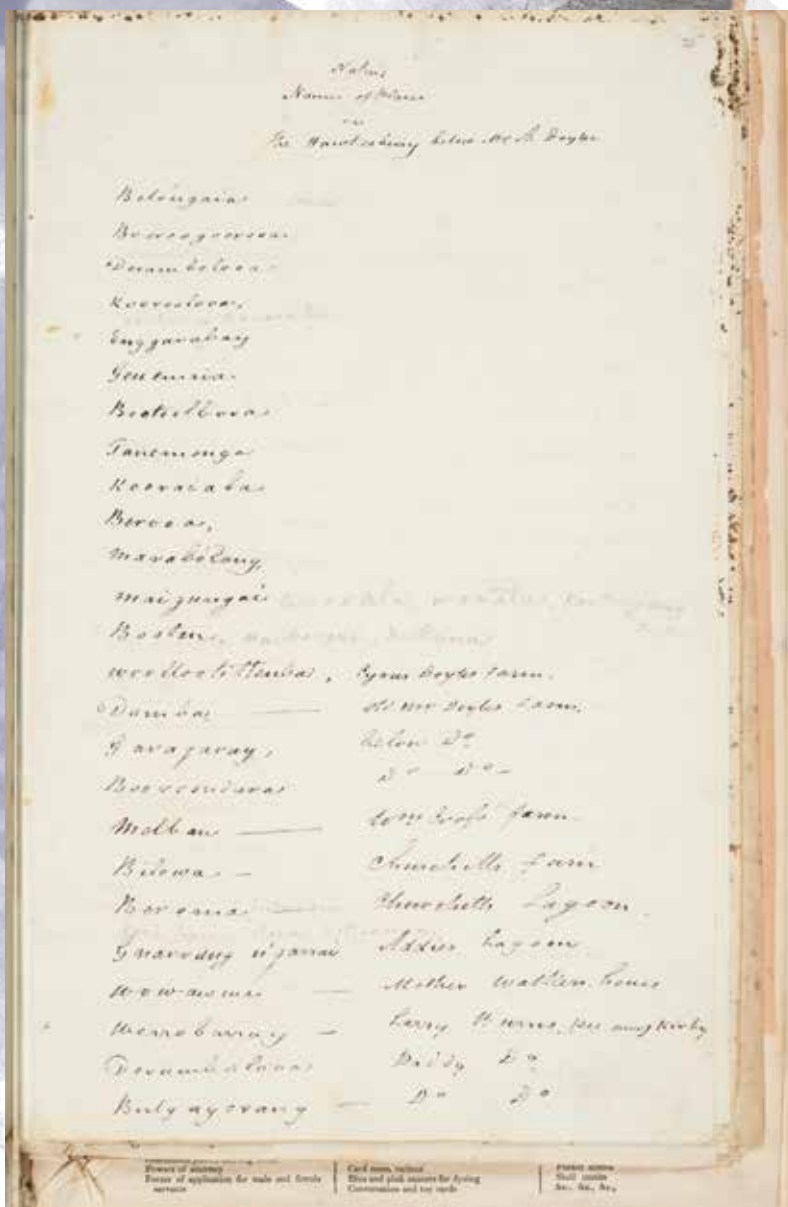
Reflect on how you are going to move from reconciliation awareness to action and share with your friends using **#NRW2021** and **#MoreThanAWord**.

If you're stuck, check out the actions for moving from safe to brave in the 2021 State of Reconciliation Report.

Join the conversation on Facebook (@ReconciliationAus), Instagram (@ReconciliationAus), and Twitter (@RecAustralia).



Jessica Johnson's artwork for 2021 National Reconciliation Week: Action



Rev McGarvie's 1829 list of Aboriginal place names on Dyarubbin, the Hawkesbury River. Photo: Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, courtesy of Grace Karskens

# A DEEP HUMAN HISTORY: REMAPPING DARUG PLACE NAMES AND CULTURE ON DYARUBBIN, THE HAWKESBURY RIVER

Historian Grace Karskens, in collaboration with Darug Traditional Owners and researchers, Leanne Watson, Erin Wilkins, Jasmine Seymour and Rhiannon Wright, explains how their truth-telling project looking into a long-lost list of Darug place names has the potential to permanently change the way we think about the Hawkesbury River—Dyarubbin.

In 2017, I came across an extraordinary document in Sydney's Mitchell Library: a handwritten list of 178 Aboriginal place names for Dyarubbin, the Hawkesbury River, compiled in 1829 by a Presbyterian minister, the Reverend John McGarvie. I was stunned. I stared at the screen, hardly believing my eyes.

After years of research, my own and others, I thought most of the Aboriginal names for the river were lost forever, destroyed in the aftermath of invasion and dispossession. Yet, suddenly, this cache of riches.

I could see McGarvie had taken a lot of care with this list, correcting spelling and adding pronunciation marks. The names appear in geographic order, so they also record where he and his Darug informant/s travelled along the riverbanks. Perhaps most important of all, McGarvie often included locational clues, like settlers' farms, creeks and lagoons.

An extraordinary idea dawned on me: what if we could restore these names to their places on the river? And then: what if these beautiful, rolling words—like Bulyayorang and Marrengorra and Woollootottemba—came back into common usage?

## Naming Country

Place names have enormous significance in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies and cultures. As in all societies, they signal the meanings people attach to places, they encode history and geography, and they are way-finding devices and common knowledge. Place names are crucial elements of shared understandings of Country, history, culture, rights and responsibilities.



## Place names are crucial elements of shared understandings of Country

Often place names are parts of larger naming systems—they name places on Dreaming tracks reaching across Country. Singular names can also embed the stories of important events and landmarks involving Ancestral Beings in places and memory. Anthropologist and linguist Jim Wafer points out their use in songs, which are memory devices, or “audible maps ... travelling song cycles that narrate mythical journeys”.



*Darug women and co-authors at Dorumbolooa. Photo: Avryl Whitney*

Dyarubbin, the Hawkesbury River, flows through the heart of a vast arc of sandstone Country encircling Sydney and the shale-soil Cumberland Plain on the east coast of New South Wales. The river has a deep human history, one of the longest known in Australia.

The ancestors of Darug, Darkinyung and Gundungurra people have lived in this region for around 50,000 years. Their histories, cultures and spiritualities are inseparable from their river Country. A mere two centuries ago, ex-convict settlers took land on the river and began growing patches of wheat and corn in the tall forests. Darug men and women resisted the invasion fiercely and sometimes successfully.

Between 1794 and 1816, Dyarubbin was the site of one of the longest frontier wars in Australian history. Invasion and colonisation kicked off a slow and cumulative process of violence, theft of Aboriginal children, dispossession and the ongoing annexation of the river lands.

Yet despite this sorry history, Dyarubbin's people managed to remain on their Country, and they still live on the river today.

McGarvie's list contrasts strikingly with the modern landscapes of the Hawkesbury and Western Sydney. Once, every place on this river and its tributaries had an Aboriginal name. Now only a handful survive on maps and in common usage.

With some important exceptions, the Traditional Owners, the Darug, rarely see themselves represented in key heritage sites, or in the everyday reminders and triggers of public memory—like place names.

Yet Western Sydney is now home to one of the biggest populations of Darug and other First Nations peoples in Australia. Could McGarvie's list be a way to begin to shift the shape of our landscapes towards a recognition of Darug history and culture?

### Living on Country

I contacted Darug knowledge-holders, artists and educators Leanne Watson, Erin Wilkins, Jasmine Seymour and Rhiannon Wright and the response was instant and enthusiastic. We designed the project together and were thrilled when it won the NSW State Library's Coral Thomas Fellowship.

The project's Darug researchers want most of all to research, record and recover environmental and cultural knowledge and raise awareness of Darug presence and history in the wider community.

Because the Darug history of Dyarubbin is continuous, the project includes an oral history component, recording 20th century Darug voices and stories of the river.

Looking back, it seems uncanny that McGarvie's list reappeared when it did—after all, we are in the midst of an extraordinary period of First Nations cultural renewal and language revitalisation.

It was obvious that McGarvie's words could be more than a list of names: it could be the key to a bigger story about the Dyarubbin, the Darug history that was lost, submerged below what historian Tom Griffiths calls “the white noise of history making”.

But to do this, we needed to put the words in their wider context: we needed to see the river whole. So, besides reconnecting the list to Traditional Owners, the project explores Dyarubbin's history, ecology, geography, archaeology and languages.

Early maps showing the old river farms helped us work out where the Darug place names belong and digitally map them. They also record long-lost landscapes of swamps, lagoons and creeks—important places for Aboriginal people that have since been modified or disappeared altogether.

The Returns of Aboriginal Natives are lists of Aboriginal people living in New South Wales in the 1830s, including the groups who lived on various parts of Dyarubbin and its tributaries. Reverend McGarvie's diaries show he knew many of these Darug people.

The archaeological record for this region is astonishingly rich. Many of the major recorded archaeological sites have sacred, spiritual and ceremonial significance, especially those located on high places.

Closer to the river, Paul Irish's archaeological mapping has revealed that the river corridors alone are lined with more than 200 archaeological sites, including engravings, grinding grooves and rock shelters, some with scores or hundreds of images in ochre, white clay and charcoal.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the project are the field trips. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples especially, visiting Country is a spiritual experience: they sense past and present converging, and the presence of their Ancestors.

### Words for Country

What about the words on McGarvie's list? Linguist Jim Wafer and I worked with the Darug team members on a glossary, scouring dictionaries of seven local and adjacent Aboriginal languages for glosses, or meanings.



*Waterholes by Darug artist Leanne Watson.  
Photo: Leanne Watson*

Many of these remain tentative—this project is, after all, only the beginning of what will hopefully be a much longer journey of discovery. Nevertheless, McGarvie's list has unlocked a wealth of information as well as intriguing and suggestive patterns.

They can be roughly grouped in four interrelated and often overlapping categories: the natural world of plants and creatures, geography and landforms, stone and earth, salt and freshwater; the social world of corroboree and contest grounds, camps and places to source materials for tools and implements; a metaphoric pattern—using words for parts of the body (mouth, arm, finger, eyes) for places on the river; and names with spiritual meanings, signifying sacred places.

Mapping the names, relocating them on Country, revealed something about how Darug people thought of Dyarubbin: as a series of zones, each with particular characteristics.

For example, on the west side of the river between Sackville and Wilberforce are 16 named lagoons or words meaning lagoons, including four different words which appear to signify different types of lagoons: Warretya, Warang, Warradé, Warrakia.

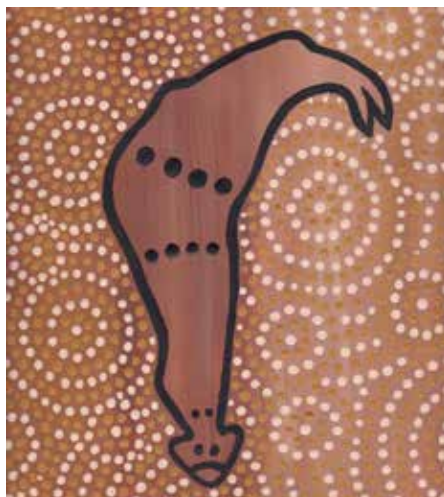
It was Warretya (lagoon) Country. Rich in birdlife, fish, turtles, eggs and edible plants, lagoons were very important places for Darug people, especially women, who harvested the edible roots and shoots of water plants such as cumbungi, water ribbon and common nardoo.

There were lagoons on the opposite side of the river, too, but here the series of place names around Cattai Creek tell us that this was Dugga (thick brush/ rainforest) Country.

Massive River-flat forest once lined all of Dyarubbin's alluvial reaches; in sheltered gullies this forest graded into rainforest. Other place names in this area suggest the tree species which grew in these forests: Boolo, coachwood, Tamangoa, place of Port Jackson figs, Karowerry, native plum tree, Booldoorra, soft corkwood. And there are places named for implements, like clubs (Kanogilba, Berambo), and fish spears (Mating), which may have been fashioned from the fine, hard timbers of some of these trees.

These Dugga place names suggest something significant about Dyarubbin's human and ecological history, too. The settler invasion is often assumed to have completely destroyed earlier landscapes, converting the bush to cleared, farmed fields. But these tree and forest names suggest that parts of the great forests survived for over three decades, and that Darug people went on using them.

### The great Eel Being



*Big Eel by Darug artist Leanne Watson.  
Photo: Leanne Watson*

Perhaps most significant and evocative are the place names which signal sacred zones on Dyarubbin. There are two different words meaning "rainbow": Dorumbolooa and Gunanday.

Both are located in places with dramatic cliffs and sharp river bends. These words are probably linked with Gurangatty, the great Eel Being, who is associated with rainbows, and who created the river and its valley in the Dreaming, leaving awesome chasms and sinuous bends in his wake. McGarvie's list reconnects us with the sacred river.

Such words remind us of something obvious, and profound. If Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are to be at the centre of their own stories, we need to look beyond European history and landscapes, beyond European knowledge and ways of thinking, and towards a First Nations sense of Country—the belief that people, animals, Law and Country are inseparable, that the land is animate and inspirited, that it is a historical actor.

Leanne Watson's painting *Waterholes*, inspired by the project, expresses this sense of Country. Her painting represents the beautiful lagoons around Ebenezer near Wilberforce and all the nourishment and materials they offered people. Now we can name some of those lagoons: Boollangay, Marrumboollo, Kallangang.

What now? Among other initiatives, the State Library of NSW is presenting the Darug women's stories in the exhibition *Dyarubbin* until 13 March 2022. A digital Story Map showcasing our project research will be available at the exhibition from May 2021. Ultimately, we plan to launch dual naming projects, which will restore these names to Dyarubbin Country.

These are truth-telling projects: they will tell the story of invasion, dispossession and frontier war. But they will also explore Darug history, culture, places and names, and the way Dyarubbin and its surrounding highlands still throb with spiritual meaning and power, and the ancient sovereignty of First Nations peoples.

This article was first published in [\*\*The Conversation.\*\*](#)





POSTER OVERLEAF



20 years of  
Reconciliation  
Australia

**MORE THAN A WORD**





W  
TAKES ACTION

-2021-

National Reconciliation Week 2021

27 May – 3 June

[nrw.reconciliation.org.au](http://nrw.reconciliation.org.au)

#MoreThanAWord #NRW2021

National Reconciliation Week is a time for all Australians to learn about our shared histories, cultures, and achievements, and to explore and reflect on how each of us can contribute to reconciliation in Australia.

Head to [nrw.reconciliation.org.au](http://nrw.reconciliation.org.au) to get involved.





# WHY EDUCATORS NEED TO #LEARNOURTRUTH

NIYEC and Hayley McQuire  
at a workshop for young First  
Nations people in Naarm  
(Melbourne). Photo: NIYEC

Hayley McQuire still remembers what it felt like to be a young Aboriginal student sitting in her grade four classroom, being taught that Captain Cook discovered Australia.

“It’s a feeling of being erased,” she said in an interview with Radio National. “I didn’t learn anything [in school] about First Nations history.”

“I grew up in my community on Country, learning stories from my dad and my family.

“Aboriginal kids bring this knowledge into the classroom, but when that’s not represented in that history lesson of how Australia came to be, it’s that feeling of erasure.”

“Where are the stories my family told me? Where’s my representation?”

For the past two years, Hayley—who is a Darumbal woman from Rockhampton in Central Queensland—has been travelling around the country as the National Coordinator of the National Indigenous Youth Education Coalition (NIYEC), listening to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people speak about their experiences in the classroom.

She’s learnt that her story is far from unique: 63% of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people surveyed by NIYEC reported that their history lessons focused on the time after Cook arrived.

These real-life experiences form the backbone of NIYEC’s new campaign: Learn Our Truth, which was launched with support from creative collective BE. and the In My Blood It Runs documentary team.

The campaign asks principals and leaders in educational institutions to take a pledge to teach the First Nations histories, knowledges and cultures where their school is located, as well as the true history of Australian colonisation.

NIYEC and Learn Our Truth is built around a central tenet of an ‘education of our own design’—an acknowledgement that our current education system is built upon a legacy of colonialism and assimilation, and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students need to be able to design their own educational experiences from a position of power and self-determination.

“It’s a ground-up community-driven approach that we are trying to really advocate for,” said Hayley in an interview with Women’s Agenda.

“It’s looking at how can we support young people in communities to establish their own types of independent schooling and develop their own curriculum from their perspective.”

After all, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were the first teachers, students and knowledge-holders of this land, and have over 80,000 years’ worth of perspectives and ways of doing to draw on and share.

And this reclaiming will likely have far-reaching implications beyond the classroom: while the 2020 *Australian Reconciliation Barometer* found evidence we are moving in the right direction—including that 80% of Australians believe it is important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures to be taught in schools—it likewise found less hopeful news, including that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to face exceedingly high incidences of racism.

For Hayley, it’s all connected.

“How do we have proper conversations about racism or how race operates in institutions and systems ... if we don’t have a firm foundation of where it started?”

“It started with the dispossession of Aboriginal land. This country has to own up to that past.

“We have to be brave to think differently, and to reimagine what the future of learning looks like.”

**Take the educator pledge at [learnourtruth.com](https://learnourtruth.com)**

Check out *Reconciliation Australia’s Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education* program’s three-part on-demand *Reconciliation in Education* webinar series. Accompanied by *Professional Learning Resources* the webinar series introduces participants to key concepts and supportive materials when thinking of moving from the ‘safe’ to ‘brave’ space of reconciliation within Australian schools and early learning services.



Summer May Finlay.

## Writer and academic Summer May Finlay uses the results of the 2021 *State of Reconciliation in Australia* report to push allies and accomplices to braver action.

Early this year, Reconciliation Australia released the 2021 *State of Reconciliation In Australia Report: Moving from Safe to Brave*. I'm sure for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who read it, there will be no surprises. There may even be a few sighs.

The reaction is not a reflection of Reconciliation Australia's ability to produce a high-quality insightful report, but rather a feeling that all of it has been said before. Therefore, someone with a healthy dose of cynicism (which is most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people) will be asking, 'if little has changed before, will much change now?'

Because I am a glass-half-full kind of person, let's start with the positive points.

The report is the second of its kind—the first was released in 2016. The most significant difference in the findings of the two reports is that currently, the Australian public is more likely to believe the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians is essential. Many also think it is vital to Close the Gap in health, justice, education and employment.

## RECONCILIATION REQUIRES ACTION. AWARENESS IS NOT THE END GAME.

This positive change can be attributed to an increase in awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories. Big thumbs up to all those who have taken the time to learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Yet, awareness isn't enough. It's not the end game. It's actually only the very first baby step. What's required from non-Indigenous people is action. Substantive action. Action that will likely make a lot of non-Indigenous people feel uncomfortable. That makes them squirm just talking about it with like-minded people. What's required is action that tackles racism including institutional, systemic and interpersonal racism.

Action is what allies and accomplices need to do if they are really allies and accomplices. Not sure what allies and accomplices look like? No fear, I have explained it in a previous article you can go find: *Where do you fit? Tokenistic, ally – or accomplice?*

But what kind of actions are required? The report outlines several organisations, government and educational institutions that need active participants in the reconciliation process.



*If you feel uncomfortable saying something, put yourself in our shoes*

From my perspective, the three headline actions that individuals within the institutions need to undertake based on the report's findings are:

### 1. Truth-telling

As outlined in the Uluru Statement from the Heart, truth-telling is essential to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This means all people, including teachers, policymakers, health professionals, service industries need to ensure that they are the individuals and the institutions telling Australia's real history. This includes histories such as the Stolen Generation, massacres, racism, missions, theft of land and medical incarceration.

### 2. Genuine partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Too often, organisations, government and education institutions make decisions on behalf of Aboriginal people. For the last 230-plus years, most decisions that impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been made without us.

We can see the legacy of the lack of self-determination, including lower levels of education, poorer health, over incarceration and fewer job opportunities. It's time to do what most of us know, at least those who are not racist. Understand that is the only way forward. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people need to be in the decision-making seat.

As an individual, what this means is to engage the right Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the decision-making process. None of this reference group business where the recommendations are ignored. Nor can you recruit a junior Aboriginal person and expect them to speak on behalf of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Substantive effort and resources need to be invested by all organisations—small medium large, for-profit, not-for-profit, government and education institutions—into recruiting and engaging with local Aboriginal communities.

It also means swallowing your pride and actioning the suggestion made by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people no matter how difficult or uncomfortable.

### 3. Race relations

Actioning the former two areas will go a long way to progressing race relations, but what ultimately through what needs to happen though is moving towards little or no racism.

The first step is challenging racism by calling it out at the pub, in the workplace, among your students, in health care and anywhere and everywhere else it raises its ugly head. This may mean challenging a friend, family member, manager or colleague.

The second part is correcting the racism. Racism is usually based on a prejudicial belief, whether that is a stereotype, incorrect information or white supremacy. You need to make sure that the prejudicial opinion doesn't stand uncorrected. Otherwise, ignorant people may assume that it is the truth. This permits an untruth to propagate.

If you see it and don't challenge and correct it, you are condoning the behaviour and are part of the problem. Don't be part of the problem. If you feel uncomfortable saying something, put yourself in our shoes. We feel uncomfortable hearing it, and we hear it a lot.

Word of warning though, if you're non-Indigenous, be careful not to make the mistake that many well-intentioned non-Indigenous people make—that is to go storming off on a crusade to protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people without consulting us on what's actually required.

If you do, you're likely to end up on the shit list, I have referred to in a previous article, [How to be a good Indigenous ally](#).

**Summer May Finlay is a Yorta Yorta writer, academic and social commentator. Follow Summer [@SummerMayFinlay](#)**

**This article was originally published by NITV Digital.**



Transport for NSW Reconciliation Action Plan Launch. Photo: Ann-Marie Calihanna

## IN CONVERSATION: FIONA MCLEAN AND REBECCA HYLAND

**How does a RAP respectfully engage in truth-telling? At the 2021 National RAP Conference, Fiona McLean, a Nyemba woman, and Rebecca Hyland, a Kamilaroi woman, discuss how Transport for NSW's RAP acknowledged transport's historical role in the forced removals of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.**

*How was the concept of truth-telling raised at Transport for NSW and what did that look like?*

**FM:** When Transport NSW decided to go ahead with our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), we got together with our First Nations staff members and peak body partners to look at what we needed to do. The decision came about that for us to have a true RAP, we had to be brave and bold to tell the true history of transport, and the role that transport played in taking many of our Stolen Generations away.

In Central Station, which is the main station in Sydney, platform one was where many of the Stolen Generations children started their painful journeys of separation from family, community and culture. We installed a memorial plaque, which has now become a public reminder to enable all transport staff and citizens passing through to reflect on past removal practices and the impact it's had on Aboriginal people.

It's also intended as a platform to begin the healing process, which has been really important. You can't have true reconciliation without telling some of the painful stories to start that healing process.

*How have you brought your staff along on this journey and did you undergo an internal process before this project was implemented?*

**FM:** It's been an ongoing process. We started the journey a bit prior to our RAP actually being launched and we've done various focus groups to instil the messages of the project.

Every opportunity we get, when we're going to meetings or when we get the chance to talk to our implementation leads or our executive sponsors, we add a little bit more of the truth-telling in there. So it's not happening overnight, it takes time.

We have an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff forum on a yearly basis, which is another safe space where we can look at areas where we need to tell more truths and to let other people know our part in the removal of the Stolen Generations. It's a hard story to tell, but it has to be told.



## *It's a hard story to tell, but it has to be told.*

*What was the general response or reaction both internally and externally when transport started these truth-telling processes?*

**FM:** To start off with I think there was a little bit of scepticism as to how far we would actually tell the truth, or whether we were actually going to walk the talk. Now, I think 18 months into our journey there's been acceptance and a lot of our staff want to know more about how they can get involved with the truth-telling stories. We're on the right path.

We have really great working relationships with Stolen Generations' members who feel that from the plaques and the actual acknowledgment of our part in their removal, their healing process has well and truly begun.

*Do you have any reflections or tips on that journey in terms of raising truth-telling as a concept and introducing it as an idea internally and trying to engage everyone in the process?*

**RH:** It's really about inspiring those that we work with and engage with on a daily basis, and to immerse themselves in the journey and become spiritually connected with us.

For me, it's also about looking to our next generation. How do we move into that space where my kids can grow up and feel fully immersed and comfortable, where their friends know about Australia's history and understand the importance of truth-telling?

It's about bringing people along for the journey around education and employment. When we break down those cycles and really showcase what capabilities we have, what we do and what we can do, that will impact upon our well-being and our mental health.

We have the ability to impact communities and reduce rates of suicide of our brothers and our sisters, our aunts and uncles. It gives hope.

*Do you have any thoughts on moving beyond raising awareness or the actions taken after that education is unfolded within your communities?*

**FM:** Transport NSW truth-telling will be ongoing. We have actually seen the change in some of the attitudes within our staff members.

We did a roadshow of our RAP after we launched it, because we knew that with 27,000 staff we weren't going to be able to get everyone together to start this healing process. So we took it on the road by every means of transport that we possibly could, with our message stick and our RAP.

I was on the train with one of my colleagues heading down to Wagga Wagga. We were starting to talk about how we were going to present to the community to bring our non-Indigenous staff along the journey, because we knew our First Nations staff were already on the journey with us.

We were pulled up by two elderly people that were on the train that had overheard us talking and we ended up doing a cultural awareness session for the whole carriage. Then, we got an invitation to speak at a Rotary Club on what reconciliation was. So you just never know where it's going to happen, but we took the opportunity to take these people on the journey with us as well.

*Do you have any advice for individuals who are feeling really motivated and ambitious about reconciliation and raising the idea of truth-telling internally but are not quite sure how to do it?*

**RH:** My advice would be to reach out, connect, have a yarn, continue learning about Aboriginal Australia and our history. Engage with us, have a yarn with your First Nations colleagues and get involved in communities and really look for opportunities to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander procurement opportunities.

Share that journey and share that learning with our younger generation as well. I would encourage organisations to reflect and really examine their RAP commitments and look and trust in their employees to lead and to be creative.

**FM:** For truth-telling to start, you've got to know the history of the organisation you're working with and some of the past policies. Be prepared to not get it right all the time. Learn from it, but don't go into a community and say 'hey, here we are we're going to make your world wonderful'.

If you have those yarns with community, you need to manage the community expectations as well. Don't over-promise something that you know that you're never going to be able to deliver. Work in true partnership with the communities to deliver to their needs, not what you want. Don't assume one size fits all. Take the time to sit down with community and hear their stories, hear their truths. Don't make your truths, their truths.



*Plaque acknowledging Stolen Generations at Platform One, Central Station, Sydney. Photo: courtesy of Transport for NSW*

*Be prepared to not get it right all the time.*



Photo collage: Reconciliation Australia

# LOOKING IN THE MIRROR: 20 YEARS OF RECONCILIATION AUSTRALIA

**Shelley Reys AO is the CEO, Arrilla Indigenous Consulting and was the inaugural Co-Chair of the Reconciliation Australia Board of Directors.**

Thirteen years ago, we witnessed a pivotal moment in Australian history and a seismic shift towards reconciliation: the Apology.

While long overdue, we can credit the timing of the 2008 Apology to an urgent act of bravery—to finally and formally acknowledge the suffering caused by decades of mistreatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

So many Australians had done the hard yards in the lead up to that day by learning about our shared history to better understand why an apology was necessary.

Together, we stood in schools, workplaces, public places, lounge rooms and on bridges in solidarity and unity, sharing a moment of deep reflection, sorrow, and pride to be Australian. On that day, I remember saying that we looked in the mirror, and we liked what we saw.

Some of the nation's most important and difficult work is reflected in the work of Reconciliation Australia over the last 20 years. As Reconciliation Australia's inaugural Chairman, I have witnessed the key milestones, challenges and lofty aspirations that have shaped our thinking and hopes for a better tomorrow.

The *2021 State of Reconciliation in Australia Report* presents that well-worn path and expertly examines the progress we have made, and the way forward. The five pillars of reconciliation, as set out in detail in the Report, give us a strong framework for attention.

Action on these pillars can only be realised by being truthful; truthful to ourselves and truth-telling. That truth must begin by owning our personal biases, and confronting our nation's collective racism, both overt and covert.

Bravery in the face of racism will be our change agent. Now is the time to take a deeply personal journey and have the uncomfortable conversations.

And we need to extend those conversations to those within our sphere of influence, both professionally and personally.

We might feel a degree of safety when discussing our organisation's Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), for instance, but are we prepared to step up our leadership roles, tackle racism head-on and drive a reconciled nation at the risk of losing the support of constituents, or shareholders, or colleagues along the way?

Personal conversations are perhaps even harder to begin but are critically important.

At the beginning of my term as Vice-Chair of the National Australia Day Council, I called on all Australians—not just Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians—to begin a formal conversation about whether we wanted to mark our nationhood on 26 January or on another date.

Today, the topic of changing the date has become a social movement of its own as a growing number of Australians now understand and acknowledge the brutal impact that colonisation has had on First Nations families and communities.

The success of the movement is in part due to those who have taken on brave conversations about how we celebrate as a nation with colleagues, mates and family.

This National Reconciliation Week, ask yourself if you too are willing to listen, challenge and learn about yourself and others by diving into uncomfortable conversations about biases, beliefs and values?

Ultimately, the measure of our success as individuals, will be the extent to which we have empowered ourselves and our sphere of influence—with the knowledge and confidence to face our biases and then, to create change.

As a nation, the measure of our success must be the position that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples find themselves in.

That is, a safe, equitable, equal and fair environment filled with prospect and hope.

Let's celebrate the progress outlined in the 2021 Report and take action on the data and the crucial focus areas it illustrates. Let's take an unapologetic, brave stance on racism to propel us faster towards a reconciled nation. Only then can we once again look in the mirror and rejoice in what we have become.



# KEY EVENTS OF THE FORMAL RECONCILIATION PROCESS IN AUSTRALIA

**1991** — The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody presents its final report and recommendations to the Australian Parliament, including calling for a process of national reconciliation. The Australian Parliament unanimously passes the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act 1991 (Cth), formally launching a process of national reconciliation and formally establishing the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR). CAR's vision was for A united Australia which respects this land of ours; values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage; and provides justice and equity for all.

**1992** — The High Court recognises native title in the landmark *Mabo v Queensland (No.2)* (1992), busting the myth of terra nullius. Prime Minister Paul Keating delivers the 'Redfern Speech' recognising the history of dispossession, violence and forced removal of Aboriginal children.

**1993** — Australian Parliament passes the Native Title Act. The first National Week of Prayer for Reconciliation is supported by Australia's major faith communities.

**1995** — The Australian Government officially recognises the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags.

**1996** — CAR expands the Week of Prayer for Reconciliation to launch Australia's first National Reconciliation Week.

**1997** — The Bringing Them Home report on Australia's Stolen Generations is launched at the inaugural Australian Reconciliation Convention in Melbourne attended by nearly 2,000 people.

**2000** — Hundreds of thousands of Australians walk across Sydney Harbour Bridge, and other bridges around Australia, to show support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aspirations. After a decade, CAR presents its final reports to the Australian people: The Australian Declaration towards Reconciliation and The Roadmap for Reconciliation. They argue a decade is not long enough to reconcile the nation.

**2001** — Reconciliation Australia is established from recommendations of CAR's final report.

**2005** — The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) was abolished by the Howard Government.

**2006** — The Close the Gap campaign for Indigenous health equality is developed following the release of the Social Justice Report 2005. Reconciliation Australia's Reconciliation Action Plan program begins.

**2007** — Australia celebrates the 40th anniversary of the 1967 referendum. June: The Australian Government, led by Prime Minister John Howard, begins the Northern Territory Emergency Response.

**2008** — Prime Minister Kevin Rudd formally apologises to the Stolen Generations on behalf of the Australian Parliament.

**2009** — Australia supports the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. Previously, Australia had been one of only four nations to oppose the Declaration.

**2010** — The National Congress of Australia's First Peoples is established.

**2011** — The Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples leads wide-ranging public consultations and delivers its findings in January 2012.

**2012** — Recognise, Reconciliation Australia's campaign to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Constitution, begins.

**2016** — The first State of Reconciliation in Australia report is published.

**2017** — The Uluru Statement From the Heart is released by delegates to an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Referendum Convention held near Uluru in Central Australia. The Turnbull Government rejects the Uluru Statement from the Heart. The Recognise campaign is disbanded.

**2018** — Victoria becomes the first Australian state to pass Treaty legislation when it passes the Advancing the Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Act 2018 (VIC).

**2020** — Tens of thousands of Australians attend Black Lives Matter marches in cities across the country to protest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths in custody and high rates of incarceration of First Nations peoples. Mining company Rio Tinto destroys two 46,000-year-old sites in the Juukan Gorge, Pilbara, and is suspended from the Reconciliation Action Plan community; Senate Inquiry held; CEO and two senior executives resign.





*Mervyn Bishop: Prime Minister Gough Whitlam pours soil into the hands of Traditional Custodian, Vincent Lingiari, Northern Territory 1975, type R3 photograph 30.5 x 30.5 cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales Hallmark Cards Australian Photography Collection Fund 1991 © Mervyn Bishop/ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet; Photo: AGNSW*

## SNAPPING BLACK

**In 1986, the first Indigenous photography exhibition was held at the Aboriginal Artists Gallery in Kent Street, Sydney. In 2021, the National Film and Sound Archive is hosting a major exhibition of works by a photographer considered to be the ‘father’ of First Nations photography in Australia.**

Reconciliation News notes the generous contribution of **Brenda L Croft**, Associate Professor, Indigenous Art History and Curatorship, ANU, to this story.

The September 1986 *NAIDOC Week Aboriginal and Islander Photographers*<sup>[1]</sup> was a landmark exhibition.

Showing the work of First Nations artists—established and emerging—it included a number whose careers later soared, nationally and internationally, and others for whom it was one of the few times their work was publicly exhibited.

The gallery no longer exists but the work of those photographers continues to frame the space of First Nations photography in Australia today.

Michael Riley, Brenda L. Croft, Tracey Moffatt, Mervyn Bishop, along with Darren Kemp, Tony Davis, Chris Robinson and Ros Sultan were the photographers featured in that 1986 exhibition.

Their work is recognised in the canon of Australian photography beside that of Frank Hurley, Olive Cotton, Max Dupain and Rennie Ellis.

From the early 1980s onwards, individual First Nations photographers, including Brook Andrew, Richard Bell, Gordon Bennett, Destiny Deacon, Fiona Foley, Dianne Jones, Ricky Maynard, Tracey Moffatt, Michael Riley, Christian Thompson and many others gained increasing recognition for their work.

These and other photographers worked to overcome memories of generations and centuries of indelible mistreatment, and the mistrust and hatred held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and people of colour, towards that most abusive of colonial weapons: a camera—being both object and subject of interpretation by non-Indigenous outsiders.

First Nations photographic practice developed both as a medium for political articulation and as a response to colonial white imaging and appropriation. This has been articulated through a wide range of photographic styles and approaches from documentary and portraiture to conceptual work.

Michael Riley (Kamilaroi/Wiradjuri), for instance, worked in black and white documentary styles as well as film, video and conceptual work.

Much of his work, like other First Nations photographers, concentrated on producing images which articulate the strength, grace and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as opposed to the stereotypical approaches of a bleak photo-journalistic approach from non-Indigenous photographers.

Yet at the same time, Riley's work strongly addressed the sacrifices First Nations peoples have made, the debilitating effects of introduced disease and collective anger following two centuries of dispossession and dislocation.

In contrast to Riley's haunting evocations of damaged land and damaged souls, Destiny Deacon (Erub/Ku Ku/Mer Peoples) drew on lived experiences of First Nations communities living in metropolitan areas—often under the radar or on the margins—co-opting kitsch Aboriginalia/memorabilia, family members and friends into fantastical scenarios.

The largest survey of her work to date, *DESTINY*, was shown at the National Gallery of Victoria this year. It presented more than 100 multi-disciplinary works made over a 30-year period, as well as newly-commissioned works.

The first Aboriginal photographer of mainstream public renown was Mervyn Bishop, whose professional career spanned four decades from the early 1960s.

Bishop is rightly considered the 'father' of First Nations photography in Australia and his work has significantly influenced our collective understanding of Australia's history.

It wasn't just his photographic skill but his cultural understanding and respectful but firm approach that enabled the capture of the iconic image *Prime Minister Gough Whitlam pours soil into hand of traditional land owner Vincent Lingiari, NT (1975)*.

About twenty years before the 1986 exhibition Mervyn Bishop, a young Aboriginal man from Brewarrina in NSW, started a photography cadetship with the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

*Aborigine Trains as News Photographer* screamed the headline in Dawn Magazine, a publication of the NSW Aborigines Protection Board.

A few years later in 1971, he won News Photographer of the Year Award with his front-page photograph, "Life and Death Dash", a career-defining honour.

In a 1991 interview with Tracey Moffatt curator of his first national exhibition celebrating 30 years of his work, *In Dreams*, he said, "It was customary at the Herald that if any photographer won the award, they would instantly get promoted, but that wasn't to be for me.

"I'd hit a barrier in what I had to remind myself was still a white world."

It made him think it might be time to put his energies into working for his own people.

Merv started with the newly-formed Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) in 1974 travelling to and documenting First Nations People, communities and events.

National politics was taking off and photography was his way of becoming involved with the new Aboriginal movement.

"I'd never been able to participate in an overt political way, because all my life I'd been so busy with work," he told Moffatt.

His body of work has covered key social, political and historical events throughout this time.

It ranges from images from his cousins in a rowboat on the river at Brewarrina, to the faces of the who's who of the national political movement of the times.

In 1986 photographers were carefully planning each shot, configuring every click of the shutter due to the cost of film and processing.

Now the digital world is full of huge numbers of images by and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; from the instantly created to the carefully curated.

Australian First Nations photographers have shown internationally for decades and photographers and photomedia artists such as Tony Albert and James Tylor—along with many others—continue to reflect dynamic and evolving cultural photographic practices.

This success continues a conversation started by those trailblazing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander photographers who first subverted the colonial lens to capture the world through their eyes.

*Mervyn Bishop, The Exhibition* is on at the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia, Canberra, until **1 August 2021**.

[1] At the time NAIDOC was a bit of a movable feast, sometimes held in July, on other occasions in September.

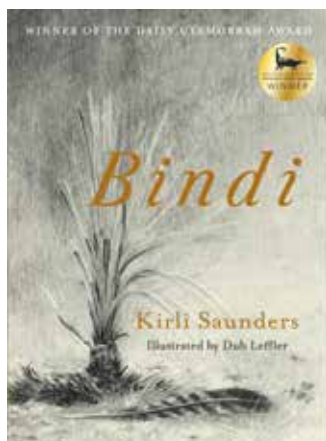


"Mervyn Bishop: Cousins, Ralph and Jim, Brewarrina 1966, gelatin silver photograph 30 x 40 cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Purchased under the terms of the Florence Turner Blake Bequest 2008 © Mervyn Bishop, Photo: AGNSW"



# LOOK FOR A BOOK!

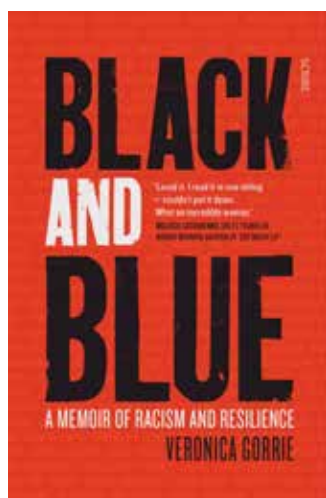
The joy gained from reading a great book cannot be underestimated—even more so if that story is shared. Take the opportunity to host a virtual or in-person book club this National Reconciliation Week and share the stories, perspectives and lives of Australia's First Nations storytellers. Here are some to get you started.



## ***Bindi* by Kirli Saunders (Magabala Books)**

*Bindi* is a verse novel that explores the life of 11-year-old Bindi and contrasts her everyday activities with devastating bushfires that begin to surround her town. With Gundungurra language beautifully woven within each verse, you gain an insight into Bindi's life; her love for hockey, her horse, and her family. Even with the vivid impact of fire, this book is not a fear-filled read. It instead sheds light on the hope and community collectiveness that comes together in times of crisis, as seen through the eyes of a young person.

The importance of caring for Country and culture is a strong theme throughout and beautifully paired with sparse black and white illustrations by Dub Leffler. If you're yet to read a verse novel, this is a perfect introductory book for all readers, and one to share with the younger people in your life.



## ***Black and Blue: a memoir of racism and resilience* by Veronica Gorrie (Scribe Publications)**

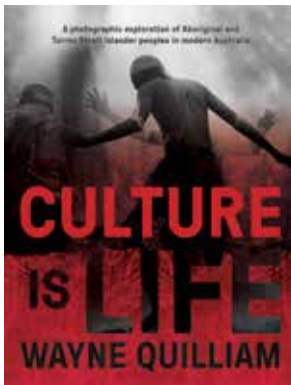
Veronica Gorrie's searing and candid new memoir, *Black and Blue*, chronicles her life as young Gurnai/Kurnai child and woman in rural Victoria, as well as her tumultuous and heart-wrenching ten years as a police officer.

From the first chapter, Gorrie's sense of justice and care for those around her is evident, as she described what it was like to grow up in her mixed non-Indigenous and First Nations household in the seventies. She describes this childhood —marked by alcoholism, domestic abuse and intergenerational trauma— in her frank, empathetic, and often humorous style.

When the memoir turns to her time in the police force, she lays bare the rampant institutionalised racism she both faced and witnessed in her workplace.

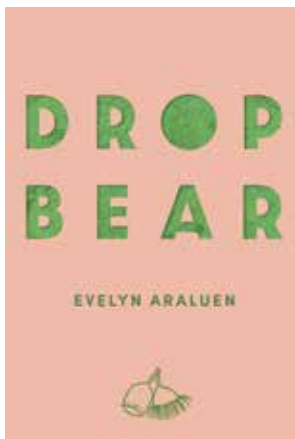
With candour and sincerity, Gorrie tells of trying to serve communities with compassion, but also of the complications, realities and trauma of being a First Nations person working within a broken criminal justice system.

At a time when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continue to be incarcerated at devastatingly higher rates than non-Indigenous people, Gorrie's memoir gives rich, complex and human context to the relationship between First Nations peoples and the police..



### **Culture is Life by Wayne Quilliam (Hardie Grant Publishing)**

Culture is Life presents a collection of images projecting First Nations culture, history, art and ceremony. Photographed and curated by award winning photographer and Adjunct Professor Wayne Quilliam, his work captures prominent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, community members and Elders alike and ensures significant events on the nation's calendar are not forgotten. Readers get a glimpse of the worlds' oldest continuing culture through the lens of a First Nations photographer, who beautifully captures all who move in front of his camera.

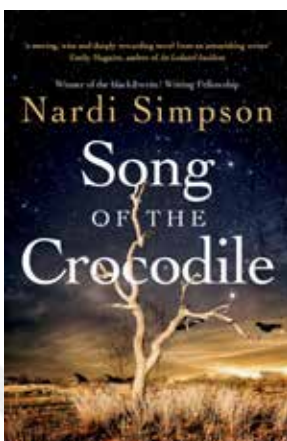


### **Dropbear by Evelyn Araluen (UQP)**

*The bloodied face of history is black, is bruise spilling from a mouth that won't swallow its own tongue.*

Award-winning author, poet and critic, Evelyn Araluen's first collection, *Dropbear*, is imperative reading to contextualise the political moment and racialised culture in Australia, from a First Nations perspective. Using a sinister collage of nostalgic Australiana tropes and kitsch—as well as their more recent, memeified iterations such as Dropbears and tattoos of Banksias on Melbourne hipsters—this collection draws the eye to and then skewers our imaginations of Australia, to great effect.

Moving from poetry to prose and everything in between, Araluen's voice is present, urgent and compelling. A Bundjalung woman raised on Darug Country and the co-editor of the literary journal *Overland*, Araluen masterfully goes from satirising Australian mythology—*Straya is a wild straggly abyss with one fence struck through*—to capturing the suffocating anxiety experienced by First Nations peoples during increasingly destructive bushfires: *I WROTE THIS POEM AT A DESK COVERED IN ASH*. The cumulative effect is a dizzying kaleidoscope of the political and the personal—Araluen's sweeping, critical voice is one to follow.



### **Song of the Crocodile by Nardi Simpson (Hachette Australia)**

Have a penchant for grand family epics, steeped in history, mysticism, and secrets threatening to boil over? Look no further: *Song of the Crocodile* is for you. Longlisted for the 2021 Stella Prize, *Song of the Crocodile* follows the multi-generational Billymil family who suffer through the everyday indignity and violence of the racism that runs rampant through their small town—Darnmoor, 'The Gateway to Happiness'. The decisions of older Billymil's come to imbue the lives of the younger ones, and with ancestors appearing throughout the story, tying and weaving the members of the family together, and reminding us that the ramifications of colonial violence continue to play out for generations to come. Devastating, spiritual, and stunningly dotted with Yuwaalaraay language, this book is a song that will stay with you long after reading..



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