



Did you catch the 2014 SBS series, [First Contact](#)? It covered some prominent myths about Aboriginal people. Help us bust some more ongoing myths and join the conversation about First Contact using the hashtag [#FirstContactSBS](#).

## Myth 1

**Myth:** “I don’t have anything to apologise for and Aboriginal people should just get over it.”

**Fact:** Since colonisation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have had many wrongs and abuses committed against them. For generations Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were removed from their families, denied citizenship rights in their own country, banned from travelling freely, punished for speaking their languages and denied access to education and health care. These events didn’t happen that long ago, and the multiple effects of these traumas continue to play out in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people today.



[The Apology from the Australian Government](#) was an acknowledgement that the First Australians had suffered from unspeakable tragedies, had profound grief, suffering and loss inflicted upon them, and that they were owed a heartfelt apology from the people that had dispossessed them. Without laying blame or guilt at the feet of current Australians, the Apology was an important moment of acknowledgement, healing, and reconciliation.

The Productivity Commission undertakes regular reports on the impact of government policies and programs on First Australians. The [2014 report shows some positive trends in the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians](#), but there is still more to be done.

## Myth 2

**Myth: “People with white skin aren’t Aboriginal or are only part Aboriginal.”**

**Fact:** Aboriginality cannot be defined by skin colour or ‘percentage of Aboriginal blood’. It is also incredibly offensive to attempt to do so, as government departments used such policies for decades, and they proved to be inconsistent, unfair, and entrenched Aboriginal disadvantage.

Aboriginality is connected with upbringing, culture, community, and identity, as well as descent. Therefore, people who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander may be dark-skinned, light-skinned, blue-eyed, dark-haired and anything in between.

Today, it is generally accepted that an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person is a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, who identifies as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which he or she lives.

## Myth 3

**Myth: “Real Aboriginal people live in the bush and live off the land in a traditional lifestyle.”**

**Fact:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live throughout Australia, and like other Australians lead diverse and varied lifestyles. Living in a city does not mean you are somehow ‘less Aboriginal’.

In fact, most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in cities and towns, with 35 per cent living in major cities, and only 21 per cent living in remote areas.

Aboriginality is not dictated by a postal address, a way of life or skin colour, but connection with community, culture and identity.



## Myth 4

**Myth: "It’s racist and unfair that Aboriginal people have the right to hunt endangered species and non-Indigenous Australians don’t."**

**Fact:** Under the Native Title Act 1993, Traditional Owners have the right to hunt animals, including endangered turtles and dugongs. For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people animals hold special social and cultural value. Hunting these animals allow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to maintain their cultural connections to land and sea country.



This right is not un-restricted. Hunting must be done by Traditional Owners on their own country and for traditional purposes. The use of modern equipment is allowed for these purposes. Caring for Country and spiritual connection to land and sea is intrinsic to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's core values and way of life. [Some Traditional Owners have chosen to restrict traditional hunting of endangered species](#) in recognition of conservation concerns.

## Myth 5

**Myth: “There weren’t many Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people killed when Australia was colonised by Britain. The land was basically empty.”**

**Fact:** British settlers claimed the land of Australia was terra nullius (land belonging to no one), but this has been proven repeatedly to be untrue. There were hundreds of different Aboriginal nations and language groups, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples had been living and practicing culture in [Australia for over 60,000 years](#). It is not surprising then, that when British representatives began to occupy Australia, Aboriginal people resisted. [The Frontier Wars were fought between 1788 and the 1920s](#). Recent estimates suggest that [over 65,000 Aboriginal people were killed during this time in Queensland alone](#).

## Myth 6

**Myth: “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people do not have a special connection to the land. Their lifestyle has changed so connection to land doesn’t matter anymore.”**

**Fact:** After living on the continent of Australia for more than 60,000 years, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have an incredibly strong connection to land, sea and waters, as their way of life was maintained by living in close relationship to the environment.

‘The Dreamtime’ or ‘the Dreaming’, refers not only to the creation process, but also to the environment Aboriginal people live in, and always includes the significance of place. To Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, there are many places in the Australian environment—such as Uluru—that are equally as sacred as a church may be to someone of Catholic faith.



## First Contact

Did you know, according to the 2012 [Australian Reconciliation Barometer](#), six out of 10 Australians have had little to no contact with First Australians?

First Contact explores this issue by taking six outspoken Australians and immersing them in Aboriginal Australia for the first time – catch all episodes on SBS OnDemand.

[The First Contact website](#) has a range of video clips and resources you can use to take this national conversation about First Australians from the television to your workplace, school or sporting field.

Don't forget to catch the [Awaken special with Ernie Dingo](#) and First Contact Insight special on [SBS On Demand](#).

This fact sheet was produced in association with SBS at the time of the release of First Contact in 2014.

*Image credits: Cole Bennetts; Wayne Quilliam, and SBS.*