

National Reconciliation Week



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National Reconciliation Week 2025

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

About this year's theme

The National Reconciliation Week (NRW) 2025 theme, **Bridging Now to Next**, reflects the ongoing connection between past, present and future.

Bridging Now to Next calls on all Australians to step forward together, to look ahead and continue the push forward as past lessons guide us.

In the #NRW2025 theme artwork created by Kalkadoon woman Bree Buttenshaw, native plants – which are known for regenerating after fire and thriving through adversity – symbolise our collective strength and the possibilities of renewal. This is a time for growth, reflection, and commitment to walking together.



Twenty-five years ago, Corroboree 2000 brought together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous leaders in a historic call for reconciliation. We continue that work in 2025, inviting all Australians to join us in **Bridging Now to Next** – building a more united and respectful nation.

Why is National Reconciliation Week important?

National Reconciliation Week provides a focus for working towards our goal of a just, equitable and reconciled Australia

National Reconciliation Week is an ideal time for organisations, schools, universities, community groups and workplaces to advance understanding of reconciliation within their own places and their own lives. National Reconciliation Week provides a focus for working towards our goal of a just, equitable and reconciled Australia

It began as a Week of Prayer for Reconciliation in 1993, supported by Australia's major religious groups. Three years later it evolved into National Reconciliation Week under the guidance of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (now Reconciliation Australia).

National Reconciliation Week is organised by **Reconciliation Australia**, an independent, not-for-profit organisation established in 2000. It is the national organisation responsible for building and promoting reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians. Each year a different theme is created.

The day before National Reconciliation Week, 26 May, is National Sorry Day, which was first held in Sydney in 1998 and is now commemorated nationally to remember and honour the Stolen Generations

What is National Reconciliation Week?

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.

What's the significance of 27 May and 3 June?

27 May marks the anniversary of the 1967 referendum when Australians voted to remove clauses in the Australian Constitution that discriminated against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

1967 Referendum

On 27 May 1967, the Australian Government held a referendum in which more than 90 per cent of Australian voters voted 'Yes' to counting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the census and giving the Australian Government the power to make laws for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

When the Australian Constitution was written in 1901 there were only two parts that referred to First Nations people. Section 51 (xxvi) gave the Commonwealth power to make laws with respect to 'people of any race, other than the Aboriginal race in any state, for whom it was deemed necessary to make special laws.' Section 127 provided that 'in reckoning the numbers of people of the Commonwealth, or of a State or other part of the Commonwealth, aboriginal natives shall not be counted.'

This meant that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people weren't recognised as part of the Australian population.

Prior to 1967, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples did not have the same rights as other Australians under the Australian Constitution. They were controlled by the various state governments including the right to:

- Vote in state elections
- Marry who they chose
- Live and move around where they chose
- Own property where they chose
- Receive the same pay as other Australians
- Drink Alcohol or enter hotels and many local venues

Because the state governments made these laws particular to their own states, if an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person lived in New South Wales, he or she had the right to do some of the things listed above. If the same person lived in Queensland, they had

none of these rights. One of the most important outcomes of the referendum was to provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a symbol of recognition. The recognition of inequalities gave the 1967 referendum longstanding significance for all Australians.

Mabo Day

3 June marks the historic 1992 Mabo decision in which the High Court of Australia recognised native title—the recognition that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights over their lands did survive British colonisation.

Mabo Day is marked annually on 3 June. It commemorates Mer Island man Eddie Koiki Mabo and his successful efforts to overturn the legal fiction of terra nullius, or land belonging to no-one.

The Mabo decision came out of a legal case held in 1992. The full name of the case was Mabo and others v Queensland (No 2) (1992). The legal decision was made by the High Court on 3 June 1992. The High Court is the highest court in Australia's judicial system.

Eddie Mabo challenged the Australian legal system and fought for recognition of the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners of their land.

Why was the case so important?

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples occupied Australia for 65,000 years before the British arrived in 1788. They spoke their own languages and had their own laws and customs; they had a strong connection to their traditional land or Country.

When the British arrived, they declared that Australia was terra nullius (literally 'empty land'—or land that belongs to nobody). As a result, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' occupation of and unique connection to the land were not recognized. The British took the land without agreement or payment.

What was the result?

The Mabo case ran for 10 years. On 3 June 1992, the High Court of Australia decided that terra nullius should not have been applied to Australia. This decision recognised that

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have rights to the land—rights that existed before the British arrived and can still exist today.

The Mabo decision was a turning point for the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights because it acknowledged their unique connection with the land. It also led to the Australian Parliament passing the Native Title Act in 1993

How can I or my group or organisation get involved?

Reconciliation Australia encourages individuals, community groups and organisations to learn more about the needs and process of reconciliation, participate in, or hold educational events, encouraging every person to be active in their social circle, their school or work life and their neighbourhood, to promote and ensure a just, equitable and reconciled Australia.

- Visit the Reconciliation Australia website for more information and to discover what activities and events are taking place in your local area during National Reconciliation Week.
- Host a Reconciliation Evening, or Liturgy in your parish/community.
- Attend local Reconciliation events in your area.
- Take the time to learn about our shared history and the rich Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures of Australia.
- Talk to family and friends about why it is important for all Australians to come together and build respectful relationships with each other.
- In your parishes/communities and workplaces, ensure every event starts with either an Acknowledgement of Country or a Welcome to Country, and it is the first item on the agenda and there is adequate time to perform it.
- Organise a cultural tour with friends, family or colleagues.
- Host a morning tea after church or community meetings, or in a workplace. Honouring and sharing food is a great way to get people on board. Invite local Elders to share in relationships and share their experiences and wisdom.
- Ask Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders or employees to share their stories at National Reconciliation Week, or other morning teas, lunches or dinners.
- Promote your National Reconciliation Week activities on social media using hashtag #NRW2025.
- Hold a church movie evening of influential films and documentaries to educate employees, parishioners and community about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. Movies such as Mabo on ABC iView, The Last Daughter, by Gravity Films or Kanyini, a film by Melanie Hogan.
- Attend Truth-telling events
- Be proactive to ensure these actions are continued throughout the year, not just during Reconciliation Week.
- Include prayers of the faithful in weekly Liturgy/Mass

Reconciliation must live in the hearts, minds and actions of all Australians as we move forward, creating a nation strengthened by respectful relationships between the wider Australian community, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We all have a role to play when it comes to reconciliation, and in playing our part we collectively build relationships and communities that value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, histories, cultures, and futures.

Archdiocese of Brisbane- Our commitment to Reconciliation

Our vision for reconciliation is to be a community in which there is mutual respect and deep solidarity between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and those of us with differing heritage: a community committed to healing the hurts of the past and being present in a spirit of mercy, love, justice, forgiveness and peace.

As we continue this journey of reconciliation, we are committed to listening to the **voices** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and to the voice of the Holy Spirit.

CONTACT DETAILS

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