



*Significant  
First Nations*

# Archdiocese of Brisbane

The Reconciliation Action Plan (2023-2025) was launched in September 2023 at the Inaugural Reconciliation Dinner.

Archbishop Mark Coleridge emphatically stated that *“It’s not enough just to listen, although that’s crucial because it’s where it begins. Nor is it enough just to learn, nor is it even enough just to love unless the love becomes action. ... So, we commit ourselves to that action; the action which takes concrete shape in the reconciliation plan.*

The Archdiocese of Brisbane is committed to achieving the Reconciliation Action Plan through respectfully building on relationships and embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives. We will continue to build upon our reconciliation journey with healing, truth telling, faith and trust in the openness to listen, learn and hear what is said and to undertake action decisively with compassion and humility.

To recognise our commitment to reconciliation, the Archdiocese is committed to ensuring the engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples outside the Archdiocese. Our aim is to reflect on the significance of reconciliation and how it is essential to our growth as a nation to provide better outcomes for future generations.

**The following is a list of culturally significant dates that celebrate and recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and culture.**

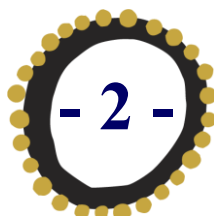
Acknowledging and celebrating these significant dates is important as a way of learning, understanding the history and richness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture, engaging and building respectful relationships and promoting reconciliation.

This booklet provides a brief overview to significant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dates.

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# ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER SIGNIFICANT DATES 2026

*January*



Survival Day

*February*



Anniversary of  
National Apology  
Day

*March*



National Closing  
the Gap Day

*March*



Harmony Day

*April*



Royal Commission  
into Aboriginal  
Deaths in Custody  
1987

*April*



ANZAC Day

*May*



National Sorry  
Day

*May*



National  
Reconciliation Week  
(until 3rd June)

*May*



Anniversary of the  
Torres Strait  
Islander Flag

*June*



Mabo Day

*June*



Anniversary of the  
Burunga  
Statement 1988

*July*



Coming of the  
Light Day

*July*



National  
Aboriginal  
Sunday

*July*



NAIDOC Week

*July*



Anniversary of the  
Australian Aboriginal  
Flag Flown

*August*



National Aboriginal  
and Strait Islander  
Children's Day  
(NATICD)

*August*



International Day  
of Indigenous  
People

*September*



Indigenous  
Literacy Day

*September*



UN Declaration on  
Rights of  
Indigenous People

*October*



Anniversary of the  
Hand back of Uluru  
to the Traditional  
Owners

*November*



Remembrance Day

*December*



Human rights Day

The Archdiocese of Brisbane acknowledges the Traditional Custodians who have walked and cared for this land for thousands of years and their descendants who maintain their spiritual connection and traditions. We thank them for their continual cultural and spiritual connection to Country as expressed through their history, music, language, songs, art and dance.

We respectfully acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the Archdiocese of Brisbane, North, South, East and West and reflect on the millions of footprints that travelled the Dreaming pathways and continue to walk this land.

## Sunday before 26 January

## Aboriginal Sunday

Aboriginal Sunday is observed on the Sunday before January 26. It invites churches and faith communities to reclaim William Cooper's call for the Australian Church to stand with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, praying for justice and their flourishing.

It is a time for congregations to listen to and learn from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christian leaders. The day stems from the 1938 Day of Mourning, when leaders including William Cooper demanded equality and full citizenship. Churches were then asked to dedicate the Sunday before January 26 as Aboriginal Sunday (formerly Aborigines' Day) in solidarity with Aboriginal peoples and the injustices they faced.

The first Aboriginal Sunday is believed to have taken place in 1941, though it was mentioned earlier in Cooper's 1938 letter to Interior Minister John McEwen and in the *Herald* (Melbourne) in January 1939.

Source: [Aboriginal Sunday 2026 - Common Grace](#)

## 26 January

## Survival Day / Invasion Day/Australia Day

For many First Nations people, 26 January is not a date to celebrate. It's a day for acknowledging the British invasion of sovereign First Nations lands and respecting the resistance and survival of First Nations Peoples in the face of systematic and ongoing injustice and denial of rights.

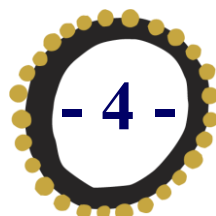
It is also the day the Aboriginal Tent Embassy was established in 1972. The Embassy was set up by First Nations activists on the lawns opposite Parliament House in Canberra. The Embassy is a hub for land rights activism and advocating for First Nations sovereignty.

Source: <https://www.commonground.org.au/article/first-nations-dates-significance-2022>

## 13 February

## Anniversary of National Apology Day

On this day in 2008, Kevin Rudd (then Prime Minister) made a formal apology to First Nations people and the Stolen Generations.



The Stolen Generations refers to the First Nations children and young people who were removed from their families by Australian federal and state government agencies and church missions between 1910 and 1970. This was the policy of assimilation.

*“We apologise for the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians. We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country.”*

— KEVIN RUDD

Source: <https://www.commonground.org.au/article/first-nations-dates-significance-2022>

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday in March**                      **National Closing the Gap Day**

National Close the Gap Day is observed on the third Thursday of March, it advocates for health equity of Australia’s indigenous people and educating the public about the health issues and barriers to well-being faced by them. Since 2007, National Close the Gap Day brings together Australians from all over the country to advocate for health equity and take meaningful action to create better and more equitable conditions for the indigenous people.

The campaign encourages people and organizations to plan events that draw attention to the health issues of Australia’s indigenous people and to support legislation and programs for the improvement of their conditions. The government’s Closing the Gap strategy is different and launched in 2008. This is a series of policies and health targets in which there has been little progress.

Source: <https://nationaltoday.com/national-close-gap-day/>

### **21 March**                      **Harmony Day**

Harmony Day takes place on the 21st of March. The event occurs on this day each year and has done for over 20 years. The day itself marks an important date, as the 21st of March is the International Day for the Elimination of Racist Discrimination.



Harmony Day was first celebrated in Australia in 1999, but its roots go back hundreds of years. In 2017, researchers published evidence in the journal “Nature” that the ancestors of Aboriginal Australians landed there from Southeast Asia about 65,000 years ago. These first settlers were the original indigenous Australians and lived in harmony with the land for centuries.

Then, in 1788, the British Empire reached Australia, landing at Botany Bay to establish a penal colony of exiled prisoners. The British used the Australian land to replicate their own Western civilization, a culture that did not work in harmony with that of the indigenous peoples of Australia and resulted in a mass slaughter of the people who had occupied the land for hundreds of years.

As a result, as the nation grew, Australia (like many countries) was a divided society. In the late 20th century, despite the legislation enshrining equal rights for all, many people still suffered from racist attacks. In 1998, after activists condemned the country for persistently turning a blind eye to its racism, the Australian government commissioned a study into the nature of racism over the last decade. The study highlighted a greater need for people to ‘live in harmony’ and, as a result, Harmony Day was created to encourage everyone to respect each other and appreciate the country’s multicultural background.

Source: <https://nationaltoday.com/harmony-day/>

## **15 April**                      **Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody** **1987**

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) 1987-1991 was established in response to growing public concerns that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths in custody were far too common and poorly explained. The Commission examined 99 deaths that occurred in custody between January 1980 and May 1989. The manner and circumstances of each death were investigated and reported on, as well as broader investigations into the social, cultural and legal factors that may have contributed to the deaths.

The Final Report, released in April 1991, concluded that First Nations peoples had a higher chance of dying in custody simply because they had a higher chance of

being in custody. A central finding was that continuing conditions of over-representation of First Nations peoples in prisons had their 'origins in structural, systemic injustice to a disadvantaged minority rather than in a propensity in this group to increased criminality'. In other words, what differs is not the behaviour of First Nations peoples compared to non-Indigenous people, but the discriminatory and violent ways in which they are treated.

Source: <https://antar.org.au/issues/justice/deaths-custody/>

## **25 April**                      **Anzac Day**

ANZAC Day is a National Day of Remembrance to honour the members of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) who served in the Gallipoli campaign in World War I. The day also broadly commemorates all Australians and New Zealanders who have served.

It's difficult to determine the exact number of First Nations people who served in World War I, but it is believed to be more than 1,000. This is because the enlistment process didn't record a person's ethnicity, and the Defence Act 1909 banned people from enlisting if they were 'not substantially of European origin or descent'.

Many First Nations people concealed their identity so they could join. Our people served, and our contribution has been significant. Some made the ultimate sacrifice, going to rest in the Dreaming. Others returned home to Country, only to face racism from white Australia.

Importantly, First Nations people have been warriors of our own resistance since 1788.

Source: <https://www.commonground.org.au/article/first-nations-dates-significance-2022>

## **26 May**                      **National Sorry Day and Anniversary of the Bringing them Home Report**

National Sorry Day is a day to remember and acknowledge the mistreatment of First Nations people who were forcibly removed from their families and communities - the Stolen Generations.



It's a day to pay tribute to their remarkable strength and resilience, and to reflect on how we can contribute to the healing process of our communities. Because sorry means you don't do it again.

Our kids need culture, community and family so we can continue intergenerational storytelling and knowledge sharing.

Source: <https://www.commonground.org.au/article/first-nations-dates-significance-2022>

On 26 May 1997 the landmark **Bringing Them Home report** was tabled in Federal Parliament. The report was the result of a national inquiry that investigated the forced removal of Indigenous children from their families. This marked a pivotal moment in the healing journey of many Stolen Generations members. It was the first time their stories—stories of being taken from their families—were acknowledged in such a way.

The forcible removal of Indigenous children was a part of assimilation policies adopted by all Australian governments throughout the twentieth century. Despite the widespread nature of the practice, mainstream recognition of the experience has only been relatively recent.

The report extensively documented the experiences of Stolen Generations members and highlighted that many issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (including substance abuse, mental illness and family violence) were strongly associated with the forced removal of children and the failure to provide healing. It concluded the forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children was a gross violation of human rights.

The Bringing Them Home report consists of 54 recommendations to redress the impacts of the removal policies and address ongoing trauma. The recommendations included a national Apology, reparations, improved services for Stolen Generations members and a process for monitoring the implementation of the report's recommendations.

Source: <https://healingfoundation.org.au/app/uploads/2017/04/BTH20-Fact-Sheet-1.pdf>

For more information



## **27 May                      Anniversary of the 1967 Referendum**

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

When the Constitution first came into being in 1901 there were only two parts that referred to the First Peoples of Australia: 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'; and 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.**

Life for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples before 1967

Before 1967, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples did not have the same rights as other Australians under the Australian Constitution. Many aspects of their lives were controlled by the various state governments, including the right to:

- Vote in state elections
- Marry whomever they chose
- Move to wherever they chose
- Own property wherever they chose
- Be the legal guardian of their own children
- Receive the same pay for the same work
- Drink alcohol.



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 they lived in Queensland, they had none of these rights.

While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples had the right to vote before 1901, it was taken away or limited when the Australian Constitution was enacted.

All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples finally gained the right to vote in Federal elections in 1962, and in all state elections by 1965 (Queensland was the last state to give the right to vote).

Source: <https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/1967-Referendum-Factsheet.pdf>

For more information

Source: <https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/indigenous-referendum>

## **27 May**                      **National Reconciliation Week (Until 3<sup>rd</sup> June)**

National Reconciliation Week commences on the anniversary of the 1967 referendum and ends on Mabo Day. It's a time for people to reflect on reconciliation in Australia, keeping in mind that the word "reconciliation" is considered problematic by some. One of the reasons is because reconciliation means "the restoration of friendly relations".

Source: <https://www.commonground.org.au/article/first-nations-dates-significance-2022>

## **29 May**                      **Anniversary of the Torres Strait Islander flag.**

The Torres Strait Islander flag was designed by the late Bernard Namok.

- The flag was created as a symbol of unity and identity for Torres Strait Islander peoples. The cultures and traditions of Torres Strait Islanders are strongly connected to the land, sea and sky — elements which are represented in the flag.
- The flag was the winning entry in a design competition in 1992.

In 1995, the Torres Strait Islander flag was recognised by the Australian Government as an official 'Flag of Australia' under the Flags Act 1953.

**Every National Reconciliation Week on 29 May, we acknowledge and pay tribute to Bernard Namok Senior on the anniversary of the Torres Strait Islander Flag**

Source: <https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/torres-strait-islander-flag>

### **3 June Mabo Day**

On 3 June 1992, the High Court ruled that terra nullius should never have been applied to Australia in the historic Mabo decision. This paved the way for the Native Title Act (1993).

The Mabo decision was named after Eddie Koiki Mabo. He led the challenge alongside Father Dave Passi, Sam Passi, Celuia Mapoo Salee and James Rice. They staunchly advocated for their rights as the Traditional Owners of the island of Mer.

Source: <https://www.commonground.org.au/article/first-nations-dates-significance-2022>

### **12 June Anniversary of the Burunga Statement**

The Barunga Statement is one of several significant painted documents that Aboriginal people have presented to the Australian Government.

Painted during the 1988 Barunga Sport and Cultural Festival, it was the culmination of years of engagement and discussion between Aboriginal groups in the Northern Territory and the Australian Government.

The statement combines Aboriginal symbolism from northern and central Australia and a translation of these into English language text, signalling collaboration and communication across cultures and languages.

The Northern and Central Land Councils presented the Statement to former prime minister Bob Hawke as a declaration of the aspirations of 'the Indigenous owners and occupiers of Australia' and a request to the Australian Government and people to 'recognise our rights'.

Source: [The Barunga Statement | AIATSIS](#)

## **1 July                                    Coming of the Light Day**

The 'Coming of the Light' is a holiday celebrated annually by Torres Strait Island people on 1 July. The day recognises the point in time when Christianity came to the Torres Strait and the acceptance of Christianity (the Light).

On 1 July 1871, the London Missionary Society sailed into the Torres Strait on a boat named "Surprise" and arrived at Erub Island.

*"On the 1st of July, every year, Torres Strait Island people come together to mark the day, feasting, and joining together, providing a theme of reconciliation, long before reconciliation was a thing, to invite other Australians to join in.*

*It is a shared day for both First Nations People and other Australians, where we, Torres Strait Island people are the host."*

Source: [Coming of the light | A Celebration of Peace - Community Services \(act.gov.au\)](#)

## **1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in July    National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Sunday**

The National Aborigines Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) formed, and the first Sunday in July became a day of remembrance and celebration for Aboriginal people and heritage. Between 1940 and 1955, the Sunday before Australia Day was known as National Aborigines Day. From 1955, the day shifted to the first Sunday in July, in order to expand from a day of protest to include celebrations of Indigenous achievements and culture as well.

Source: [The history of NAIDOC Week | Indigenous.gov.au](#)

## **1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in July    NAIDOC Week**

NAIDOC Week is marked across Australia every year, beginning on the first Sunday in July and finishing on the second Sunday. A celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, history and peoples and is one of the most important weeks on the Australian calendar.





**4 August**

## **National Aboriginal and Torres Islander Children's Day (NATICD)**

Children's Day is held annually on 4 August. National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day (Children's Day) is a time to for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to celebrate the strengths and culture of their children. The day is an opportunity for all Australians to show their support for Aboriginal children, as well as learn about the crucial impact that community, culture and family play in the life of every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child.

Children's Day is held on 4 August each year and is coordinated by SNAICC. Children's Day was first observed in 1988. And established against the backdrop of protests led by First Nations people and allies to mark the 200-year anniversary of British invasion.

The date 4 August was historically used to celebrate the birthdays of First Nations children who were taken from their families at a young age without knowing their birthday.

Source: <https://www.aboriginalchildrensday.com.au/history-of-childrens-day>

**9 August**

## **International Day of Indigenous People**

The International Day of the World's Indigenous People on August 9 pays tribute to the indigenous communities of the world.

On 23 December 1994, the United Nations General Assembly decided that the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples will be held annually on 9 August. The date marks the first day the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations held a meeting in 1982.

According to the United Nations, there are over 476 million Indigenous peoples living in 90 countries across the world, accounting for 6.2% of the global population.

Source: <https://www.commonground.org.au/article/first-nations-dates-significance-2022>

**1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday in September Indigenous Literacy Day**

Indigenous Literacy Day is presented by the Indigenous Literacy Foundation.

Indigenous Literacy Day is a national celebration of culture, stories, language and literacy. This day raises awareness of the disadvantages experienced in remote communities and advocates for more access to literacy resources.

Source: <https://www.commonground.org.au/article/first-nations-dates-significance-2022>

### **13 September                      Anniversary of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People**

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly during its 61st session at UN Headquarters in New York City on 13 September 2007.

The Declaration is the most comprehensive international instrument on the rights of Indigenous peoples.

It establishes a universal framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the Indigenous peoples of the world and it elaborates on existing human rights standards and fundamental freedoms as they apply to Indigenous peoples.

The Declaration is particularly significant because Indigenous peoples, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, were involved in its drafting.

Source: <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/un-declaration-rights-indigenous-people>

### **26 October                      Anniversary of the handback of Uluru to the Traditional Owners**

Uluru is sacred to Anangu people. It is central to their Dreaming stories and Law (Tjukurpa). Anangu people lobbied for the return of their ancestral lands for decades.

The Uluru handback took place at the base of Uluru on 26 October 1985. Hundreds of First Nations and non-Indigenous people looked on as the Governor-General passed over the title deeds for Uluru–Kata Tjuta to Anangu people.

The Uluru climb was closed permanently on 26 October 2019, on the 34th anniversary of the handback.

Source: <https://www.commonground.org.au/article/first-nations-dates-significance-2022>

## 11 November Remembrance Day

Remembrance Day is one of the most important days on our commemorative calendar. It's a day when we acknowledge those who died or suffered while serving in wars, conflicts and peace operations. Remembrance Day is held on 11 November each year. This is the anniversary of the Armistice of 1918 that ended fighting in World War I. The war didn't officially end until 28 June 1919 with the Treaty of Versailles. People in Australia and many other countries observe one minute's silence at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month because that's when the Armistice came into effect. It's a time to honour our service personnel who died or suffered in service of Australia.

Source: <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/commemoration/days/remembrance-day>

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have served in every conflict and commitment involving Australian defence contingents since Federation, including both world wars and the intervals of peace since the Second World War.

Source: <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/indigenous>

## 10 December Human Rights Day

Human Rights Day is observed annually around the world on 10 December. It commemorates the anniversary of one of the world's most ground-breaking global pledges: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). This landmark document enshrines the inalienable rights that everyone is entitled to as a human being - regardless of race, colour, religion, sex, language, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

The Declaration was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948 and sets out, for the first time, fundamental human rights to be universally protected.

As a “common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations”, the UDHR is a global blueprint for international, national, and local laws and policies and a bedrock of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development.

It is available in 577 languages, from Abkhaz to Zulu, making the UDHR the most translated document in the world.

Source: <https://www.un.org/en/observances/human-rights-day>



Scan code to access the RAP website

