



RIGHT WRONGS

'67 Referendum - WA 50 years on



CULTURAL DISCLAIMER

The Western Australian Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) acknowledges the Traditional Owners and custodians of this land. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, their descendants who are with us today, and those who will follow in their footsteps.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should be aware that this document contains images and names of deceased persons.

Readers are advised that this toolkit contains terminology and statements that reflect the original authors' views and those of the period in which they were written, however may not be considered appropriate today. These attitudes do not reflect the views of the DAA, but provide an important historical context.

Furthermore, the inclusion of the term 'Aboriginal' within this document is used to denote all people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent.



ABOUT THE LOGO

The logo was designed collaboratively between Nyoongar artist, Jade Dolman, and Wadjula designer, Matthew McVeigh. This collaboration and design is reflective of the significance of the 1967 Referendum, a decision that progressed rights for Aboriginal people within the Commonwealth government system, the result of years or tireless campaigning by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. In the centre of the design is the symbol for *beedawong* [meeting place] surrounded by *yonga bidi* [kangaroo tracks]. These tracks create the Commonwealth star within the negative space of the design. Surrounding this is the Aboriginal symbol for people.



Image: Museums Victoria: Item XM 6860.

FOREWORD



This year marks the 50-year anniversary of the historic 1967 Referendum. The Referendum was a pivotal point in modern history in Australia, as more than 90 per cent of Australians voted 'Yes' to count Aboriginal people in the same census as non-Aboriginal people, and to give the Commonwealth Government responsibility to make laws for Aboriginal people.

Prior to the Referendum, Aboriginal people did not share the same rights as non-Aboriginal Australians. The Referendum highlighted these inequalities, resulting in the highest ever 'Yes' vote recorded for a referendum.

For those who are older than me, memories of this event linger on.

Since this time, we, the Aboriginal people of this State, have become a critical voice in determining our future at a local, state and national level. But there are many challenges ahead.

It is important that all Western Australians gain a better understanding of our shared history. This Right Wrongs toolkit has been developed for this very purpose; to assist educators to foster an increased awareness and understanding amongst themselves, their students and the wider community.

This toolkit highlights some of the struggles endured by Aboriginal people in Western Australia, in their attempt to achieve equality. For the first time, the 1967 Referendum, the 1992 Mabo Decision, and the 1997 Bringing Them Home Report have been told from a uniquely Western Australian perspective.

I would like to acknowledge the efforts of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, in particular the Aboriginal History Research Unit, for undertaking the work that has led to this historical publication, and to the many community members who contributed by sharing their experiences.

Hon Ben Wyatt MLA
Minister for Aboriginal Affairs



CONTENTS

The 1967 Referendum: a Western Australian Perspective

1

In this section an introduction to the 1967 Referendum, and what WA was like at the time, is provided. What is a referendum? What were the questions that the Australian public were asked to vote on in 1967? What was the history of these questions? What was the legislation affected? What did the WA population look like? What were the results in WA in comparison to the rest of the nation? This introduction will also provide a unique Western Australian context for the remaining sections of the Toolkit. Copies of the original polling results are also included.

Compare and Contrast: The Two Extremes

2

In WA, Fremantle and Kalgoorlie present two extremes in people's attitudes toward Aboriginal rights. In the Referendum results, Fremantle recorded one of the State's highest 'Yes' votes, whilst Kalgoorlie recorded the highest 'No' vote. This section compares these results to the cities they are today.

Community Perspectives – Let's Take the Next Step!

3

Aboriginal and non- Aboriginal community members have provided reflections of what the Referendum and the High Court Mabo Decision meant or means to them and what still needs to be achieved. It is crucial to incorporate and acknowledge community perspectives from an Aboriginal voice in planning the next step forward.

Aboriginal Heroes

4

In this section the lives and contributions of some of WA and Australia's stalwart Aboriginal and Torres Strait heroes are outlined. These heroes have paved the way for social justice and Aboriginal rights in the lead up to, during and after the Referendum, Mabo Decision and Bringing Them Home Report and include William Cooper, Fanny Balbuk Yooreel, William Harris, Edward Harris, Daisy Bindi, Barbara Jackson, George Abdullah, Eddie Mabo, Mick Dodson, Hon Linda Burney MP, Hon Ken Wyatt AM MP and Joe McGinness.



Human Rights, Bringing Them Home Report and Closing the Gap

5

The legacy of the Referendum is that it was a catalyst in progressing social and legal rights for Aboriginal people. This section explores human rights in Australia, focusing on the lead up to the Referendum from an international, national and local context. **How did international policy influence Australian politics in 1967? At the time, how did Australia apply international human rights treaties to Aboriginal people?** The 20th anniversary of the Bringing Them Home Report and the Closing the Gap campaign are also acknowledged as important steps forward for equality and justice for Aboriginal people today.

Mabo Decision, Land Rights and Native Title

6

2017 marks the 25th anniversary of the High Court's Mabo Decision. This section will explore the landmark Mabo vs Queensland [No2] Case that led to the *Native Title Act of 1993* and provide overviews of Native Title and Land Rights. Additional links for further research have also been included.

Primary Source Documents

7

The National Archives of Australia holds a range of records relating to the Referendum that were created by the government agencies who played key roles in the event. The State Records Office of Western Australia is responsible for the State's archive collection, one of the largest and most important historical and cultural resources belonging to the Western Australian community. After analysis of more than 40,000 pages of archived records from both repositories, in this section short summaries of the files that are most significant to the Referendum are provided. The campaign, the major players involved and the final results are just some of the most noteworthy points of interest.

Teacher's Resource

8

A list of research questions relating to the content of this toolkit has been provided. A range of possible projects involving the Referendum and the High Court's Mabo decision, have also been included, along with a series of topics for further research.