



**COLEBROOK RECONCILIATION PARK  
SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

**SILVIO APPONYI  
SCULPTOR**

**BE  
BRAVE.  
MAKE  
CHANGE.**  
**NATIONAL  
RECONCILIATION  
WEEK 2022**

### **SORRY DAY & RECONCILIATION WEEK**

Sorry Week began in 1998 following the tabling of the *Bringing Them Home* report. Sorry Day was on 26 May this year and is followed by Reconciliation Week, 27 May to 3 June.

Sorry Day marks one of the worst episodes in the mistreatment of First Nation peoples by the descendants of those who colonised Australia. It is an opportunity for all people to reflect on how the policies of government can lead to such dreadful injustices and how we can remedy this now and create policies today, so it never happens again.

### **BRINGING THEM HOME REPORT**

In 1995 a National Inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families commenced. By the end of 1996 nearly 800 submissions had been heard. In 1997 the final report was tabled in Parliament. It concluded that:

*For individuals, their removal as children and the abuse they experienced at the hands of the authorities or their delegates have permanently scarred their lives. The harm continues in later generations, affecting the children and grandchildren.*

Fourteen years later in 2022, *Bringing Them Home* is still shocking reading. The stories beg for our compassionate understanding of the impact of intergenerational trauma.

*They changed our names, they changed our religion, they changed our date of birth, they did all that. That's why today, a lot of them don't know who they are, where they're from. We've got to watch today that brothers aren't marrying sisters; because of the Government. Children were taken from interstate, and they were just put everywhere.*

Confidential evidence 450, NSW

### **OFFICIAL APOLOGY**

On 13 February 2008, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd delivered an official apology to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Apology included:

- ◆ 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
- ◆ For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry.

- ◆ For the future we take heart; resolving that this new page in the history of our great continent can now be written.
- ◆ A future where we embrace the possibility of new solutions to enduring problems where old approaches have failed.

*Bringing Them Home* is available at [https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/pdf/social\\_justice/bringing\\_them\\_home\\_report.pdf](https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/pdf/social_justice/bringing_them_home_report.pdf)

### **RECONCILIATION WEEK**

Reconciliation Week focuses on what is still to be done to ensure that Indigenous Australians do not suffer discrimination and injustices. For that to happen the wider Australian community must be aware of and want to change entrenched inequality. As Andrew Hamilton SJ points out, Reconciliation must be based on a shared acknowledgement of the reality of colonial settlement in Australia, of its impact on the First Australians, and on a shared determination to change the ways in which Indigenous Australians are treated as second class citizens.

### **FIVE DIMENSIONS OF RECONCILIATION**



These five dimensions do not exist in isolation, but are interrelated. Reconciliation cannot be seen as a single issue or agenda; the contemporary definition of reconciliation must weave all of these threads together.

For example, greater historical acceptance of the wrongs done to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples can lead to improved race relations, which in turn leads to greater equality and equity.

Reconciliation is an ongoing journey that reminds us that while generations of Australians have fought hard for meaningful change, future gains are likely to take just as much, if not more, effort.

In a just, equitable and reconciled Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children will have the same life chances and choices as non-Indigenous children, and the length and quality of a person's life will not be determined by their racial background.

### **STATEMENT FROM THE HEART**



In *Mission*, a collection of Noel Pearson's essays and speeches, he begins a recount of the week at Uluru when the *Statement From the Heart* was finalised, with a reflection:

*My first two years of life, I was like a refugee child in detention, stateless and unpossessed of citizenship. The supreme law of the home where I was born provided that our people should not be counted in the national census, and that the Commonwealth parliament should not hold any responsibility for us.*

The Uluru Statement from the Heart

The statement distils the dreams and passions of more than a thousand Indigenous delegates from across the country and the tens of thousands of families and communities from which they were drawn.

The Uluru statement rejects mere symbolic minimalism in favour of practical reform. It calls for constitutionally enshrined voice in political decision-making affecting our people.

Empowerment can come through having a voice. A First Peoples' Voice to Parliament will enable our peoples' ancient spiritual sovereignty to shine through Australia's constitutional arrangements and political processes, as the statement explains, 'as a fuller expression of Australia's nationhood.' This will address the torment of our powerlessness.

The Statement from the Heart encapsulates the aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the country in this respect:

- ◆ We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people to take a rightful place in our own country. When we have power over our destiny, our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be their gift to their country.

Pp 564, 565 & 566

For information on the Statement from the Heart <https://ulurustatement.org/the-statement/>