

Key Events and the Racial Discrimination Act

Race Discrimination Commissioner, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
State of the Nation 1995 - A Report on People of Non-English Speaking Backgrounds
Canberra, Australian Government Publishing Service, 1995, pp 289-292.

1966

Sir Paul Hasluck signed the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* (CERD) on behalf of Australia on 13 October.

1967

National referendum enabled the Federal Government to assume responsibility for Aboriginal people in the States.

1971

International Year for Action to Combat Racism.

Neville Bonner became the first Aboriginal parliamentarian as a Liberal Senator from Queensland.

Anti-apartheid demonstrations were held around Australia during the Springbok tour.

1972

Aboriginal tent embassy established on lawns outside Parliament House as the focus for the land rights movement.

Election in December of the Whitlam Labor Government, whose policies included the introduction of human rights and anti-discrimination legislation.

1973

Aboriginal Land Rights Commission and National Aboriginal Consultative Committee established.

Government announced that future migration policy would be non-discriminatory with regard to race, colour and nationality.

Telephone Interpreter Service (TIS) established.

Al Grassby delivered the 'Family of the Nation' speech introducing the term 'multicultural' and linking it with social justice.

1974

Attorney-General Lionel Murphy twice introduced a Racial Discrimination Bill into Parliament although, like the attempt in 1973, it did not succeed.

Committee on Community Relations Report delivered in August by Walter Lippmann after wide consultation with ethnic communities - the first time such consultation had been canvassed.

Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria established, the first of its kind

1975

Attorney-General Kep Enderby introduced racial discrimination legislation which was passed on 11 June, subsequently allowing Australia to ratify CERD.

The Office of the Commissioner of Community Relations was opened on 31 October with the commencement of the RDA. Al Grassby was appointed as the first Commissioner.

Ethnic Community Council of NSW established following large public meeting in Sydney Town Hall in July attended by both the Prime Minister Gough Whitlam and the Leader of the Opposition Malcolm Fraser, marking a bipartisan acceptance of multiculturalism.

1976

Commonwealth *Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act* implemented the main recommendations of the Woodward Report which had been tabled in 1974.

First Vietnamese 'boat people' arrived in Darwin.

1978

'Ranger Uranium' agreement signed by the Commonwealth and the Northern Land Council.

Fraser Government accepted recommendations of the Galbally Report (a review of post-arrival services and programs for immigrants) including its encouragement of multiculturalism.

1979

Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs (AIMA) was established.

Points system introduced for immigration selection.

Aboriginal Development Commission established.

1980

National Federation of Land Councils formed.

Dispute at Noonkanbah (WA) over drilling on sacred sites drew national and international attention to Aboriginal rights.

Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) began television transmission in Sydney and Melbourne.

1981

End of assisted passages to all immigrants except refugees; the Special Humanitarian Program (SHP) established for quasi-refugees.

National Aboriginal Conference hosted an Australian meeting of the World Council of Indigenous People.

Human Rights Commission established on 10 December, encompassing the Office of the Commissioner for Community Relations.

1982

High Court upheld the validity of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 after challenge from the Queensland Government.

Royal Commission into atomic testing at Maralinga (SA) commenced.

First Vietnamese immigrants selected under the 'Orderly Departure Program' arrived.

Jeremy Long appointed as Commissioner for Community Relations.

1984

The 'Blainey Debate' focused on Australian attitudes to Asian immigration.

First significant group of refugees from Africa (mainly Ethiopia) arrived.

First congress of Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) held in Melbourne.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage (Interim Protection) Act passed.

1985

Uluru handed back to its traditional owners.

High Court (in *Gerhardy v. Brown*) spelled out

the meaning of 'special measures' under the RDA.

All Land Councils protested the Federal Government's proposed amendments to the *Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act*.

Federal Government announces its Access and Equity Strategy to ensure that immigrants have equitable access to government services.

1986

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission established on 10 December, (replacing the Human Rights Commission), with a broader mandate than its predecessor.

Irene Moss was appointed to the newly-created position of Race Discrimination Commissioner, replacing the role of Commissioner for Community Relations.

Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) established within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, replacing AIMA.

Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) established in response to widespread national concern.

Toomelah Inquiry commenced.

1988

The 'Barunga statement' of national Aboriginal political objectives was issued to the Federal Government.

Fitzgerald Committee tabled wide-ranging report on Australia's immigration policies.

HREOC announced a National Inquiry into Racist Violence (NIRV).

1989

Access and Equity strategy extended to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and all those of non-English speaking background.

1990

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission was established.

1991

Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation formed.

1992

High Court decision in Mabo case overturned the doctrine of *terra nullius*.

1993

Mick Dodson was appointed as the first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner at HREOC.

Passage of the *Native Title Act*.

1994

Native Title Tribunal established to hear land claims.

Zita Antonios was appointed as Race Discrimination Commissioner.

1995

High Court upheld *Native Title Act* after challenge by the West Australian government, again relying on the strength of the RDA over inconsistent State legislation.

National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children commenced.

Racial hatred legislation allowing amendments to RDA finally passed in September after three years of heated media and community debate about 'freedom of speech'.

20th anniversary of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*.

30th anniversary of the 'Freedom Ride' led by Charles Perkins into north-western NSW in support of Aboriginal rights.

50th anniversary of the creation of the Department of Immigration heralding the large-scale post-war immigration intake.