



## RECONCILIATION WEEK @ HHS – TOUGH QUESTIONS

During Reconciliation Week, members of the SRC asked our HSC (Year 12) and Preliminary (Year 11) Aboriginal Studies classes some 'tough questions' about Reconciliation, and what these issues mean for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Students filmed their answers, based on the format of the ABC TV show *You Can't Ask That*.

Currently, Hunters Hill HS offers Aboriginal Studies from Year 11, with Year 9 students able to study the Preliminary HSC course as an accelerated option, completing the HSC course in Year 10. The 2020 HSC class includes one Year 12 student and four Year 10 students, while the 2020 Preliminary HSC class consists of two Year 11 students and six Year 9 students.

The questions posed by the SRC covered a range of issues, which are expanded on here.

### **Do many Aboriginal people still live in the bush?**

The majority of Aboriginal people live in Australia's cities, just like the majority of non-Aboriginal people. About a third of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in NSW live in the Sydney region, and about a third of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia live in NSW.

### **What is reconciliation?**

Reconciliation is about bringing all Australian people together. For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, this means being able to practise culture, speak language, hold title to land, access land, and recognising the atrocities of the past and the issues being faced in the present. Importantly, reconciliation should recognise the significant contributions made by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to contemporary Australian society and help everyone deal with the legacy of colonisation/invasion.

### **What events does Reconciliation Week acknowledge?**

Reconciliation begins with the anniversary of the *Bringing Them Home* report (26<sup>th</sup> May 1997), which recognised the damage done to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and cultures as a result of the separation of children from their families. The report recommends that government funding is made available to support those affected, that reparations be made to members of the Stolen Generations, and that all Australian parliaments offer apologies acknowledging the responsibility of previous governments in carrying out the removal policies.

The ACT government commemorates Reconciliation Day every year on 27<sup>th</sup> May, and this marks the beginning of National Reconciliation Week.

Reconciliation Week ends on 3<sup>rd</sup> June, which marks the anniversary of the High Court's decision in the *Mabo v Queensland* case (1992) which found that Britain's claim of *terra nullius* over the Australian continent was not correct and that, therefore, native title should still be recognised.

### **How can I help Aboriginal people and communities?**

All the evidence shows that Aboriginal communities do better when they're allowed to make their own decisions about their future. This doesn't mean the Government can just neglect them totally,

however. What Government needs to do is support Aboriginal communities to self-determine how they will address social and economic problems.

As individuals, non-Aboriginal people can also support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities by listening to Aboriginal voices and being an ally in support of self-determination.

### **What is the difference between an 'Acknowledgement of Country' and 'Welcome to Country'?**

An Acknowledgement of Country can be spoken by anyone, and is a way of recognising that all land is Aboriginal land and to show respect for Traditional Owners and ongoing Aboriginal connection to country. A Welcome to Country is a formal welcome to visitors, and is delivered by Traditional Owners, or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have been given permission from Traditional Owners.

### **Why is the Mabo High Court decision so important?**

The High Court's decision in *Mabo v Queensland* (1992) found that British claims over the Australian continent were incorrect under the legal doctrine of *terra nullius*. This means that the declaration had not extinguished 'native title', and that contemporary Australian law should still recognise this form of ownership.

Eddie Koiki Mabo was a Torres Strait Islander from Mer (Murray Island) who successfully challenged the classification of Murray Island as 'Crown Land' based on the traditional system of land inheritance used by the Mer people.

### **Is it okay for non-Aboriginal people to wear the Aboriginal flag on t-shirts or to fly the Aboriginal flag?**

The Aboriginal flag is an official flag of Australia and one of the most significant icons for Aboriginal peoples and Australians more broadly. Designed by Harold Thomas in 1971, the Aboriginal flag holds many different meanings to Aboriginal people and can symbolize significant historical and contemporary moments in time from the land rights movements of the 1970s to Cathy Freeman's triumphs in the sporting arena. More importantly the flag can symbolize Aboriginal people's pride in identity, our strength and our aspirations for the future.

For me, if I see a non-Aboriginal person wearing an Aboriginal flag, or the flag flying gallantly on a building or in public, it represents to me that Aboriginal pride, strength, identity and our unique place in modern Australia is acknowledged. It represents that Australia's black history and future is a shared by our non-Aboriginal brothers and sisters. It's become a shared symbol of solidarity.

- From *deadlyquestions.vic.gov.au*

### **What benefits do Aboriginal people receive from the government?**

Indigenous people receive the same level of public benefits as non-Indigenous people. Individuals do not get extra funding because they are Indigenous. However, specific government programs, not additional income, have been introduced for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples because they are the most economically and socially disadvantaged group in Australia. Special programs are necessary to help overcome disadvantage.

- <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/questions-and-answers-about-aboriginal-torres-strait-islander-peoples#q5>

### **Who was Charles Perkins?**

Charles Perkins was a prominent Aboriginal activist and community leader. In his youth, he was a noted football (soccer player), trialling with Liverpool FC, Everton and Manchester United. He spent some time in England playing high-level amateur football with Bishop Auckland FC, before returning to Australia, where he continued to coach and play football in Adelaide and Sydney.

In 1965, Charles Perkins rose to national prominence as a leader and organiser of the *Freedom Ride*.

In 1966, he graduated from the University of Sydney with a Bachelor of Arts, becoming the first Aboriginal man in Australia to graduate from university.

### **What was the Freedom Ride?**

Inspired by the Freedom Riders of the American Civil Rights Movement, students from the University of Sydney formed a group called the Student Action for Aborigines, led by Charles Perkins among others, and travelled into New South Wales country towns on what was considered a fact-finding mission.

What they encountered was essentially racial segregation; the students protested, picketed, and faced violence, raising the issue of Indigenous rights. They commonly stood protesting for hours at segregated areas such as pools, parks and pubs which raised a mixed reception in the country towns.

Australia overwhelmingly passed a 1967 referendum removing some discriminatory sections from the Australian Constitution and enabling the federal government to take direct action in Aboriginal affairs.

### **In an ideal world, what do Aboriginal people want from the government?**

Following the Uluru Statement from the Heart, it is hoped that the Federal government will begin the process of consulting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leaders across Australia to build a 'First Nations Voice', which will provide advice to the Federal parliament and government on matters affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. However, this is likely to be a long and complex approach to achieving change.

The Uluru Statement also calls for 'truth telling', which recognises the wrongs done to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people since colonisation/invasion.

In simpler terms, many people are hopeful of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people achieving equity in government power, alongside responsibility and authority.

### **Why isn't the Aboriginal Flag flown on the Sydney Harbour Bridge?**

Currently, the Aboriginal Flag is raised on the Harbour Bridge 15 days a year, including on Australia Day and during annual NAIDOC weeks, which take place in July, but there has been a campaign to have the flag flown permanently.

Recently, NSW Transport Minister Andrew Constance supported the proposal, but has cited the cost of installing a third flag pole (so that the Australian and NSW flags can also be flown at the same time) as a prohibitive factor. This has inspired a crowd-funding campaign: <https://www.examiner.com.au/story/6782434/woman-crowdfunds-for-aboriginal-shb-flag/>

### **Who are the Stolen Generations?**

The Stolen Generations are the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were separated from their families as children under state and territory 'protection' laws. The effects of removal and separation have been documented extensively, and include intergenerational trauma.

In 2008, Kevin Rudd issued an apology on behalf of the Australian parliament, acknowledging the government's responsibility for the impact of these policies and events.

### **Why are there so many negative stereotypes about the intelligence of Aboriginal people, and about alcohol and drug abuse?**

The cycle of drug and alcohol abuse has significant impacts in many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and is a big problem. However, Aboriginal people are less likely to consume alcohol than non-Aboriginal people.

The community impacts of post-traumatic stress and intergenerational trauma are also made worse by the effects of drug and alcohol abuse.

There are also many mainstream media stereotypes that continue to be aired that reflect negatively on non-Indigenous perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Up until as recently as the 1970s, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were also excluded from school, which limited employment opportunities and created a disconnect with the mainstream education system.

### **What do you wish non-Aboriginal people knew about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?**

Many non-Indigenous Australians are yet to understand the importance of culture. There is a possibility for culturally safe steps to be taken to benefit education, benefit stories being told in the media, and the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on television and news stories. This has the potential to break down barriers between indigenous and non-indigenous people.

It is also important to remember that Aboriginal history is part of Australia's history, and this is true for the good parts and the bad parts. We should all want to learn about all our shared history. It is helpful for non-Indigenous people to learn about the lives of local nations and tribes before colonisation/invasion, which helps everyone embrace history and share knowledge.

### **What can I do to help reconciliation?**

Be an ally, listen and learn.