

## **18<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the National Apology to the Stolen Generations**

**By Heather Ferris**

On 13 February 2026 marks the eighteenth anniversary of the National Apology to the Stolen Generations.

For much of Australia’s colonial and post-Federation history, policies of forced removal saw thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children taken from their families and communities. These children, now known collectively as the Stolen Generations, endured deep and enduring trauma, including loss of culture, identity, family and community that echoes into the present day. These removals were legally permitted and administered by successive state and federal governments from the late 19th century well into the 1970s.

On 13 February 2008, then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd delivered the National Apology, acknowledging the profound grief, suffering and loss inflicted by these government policies. His words recognised the role of the law in facilitating this harm and affirmed a national responsibility to repair, heal and transform.

In the words delivered on that day:

“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.”<sup>1</sup>

The Apology was widely welcomed by many Indigenous leaders and communities as a long-overdue acknowledgment of historical wrongs. It has since become a foundation for annual commemorations and a hallmark in national conversations about reconciliation.

The [Bringing Them Home](#) report obtained testimony from over five hundred Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia, as well as from Indigenous organisations, foster parents, State and Territory Government representatives, church representatives, other non-government agencies, former mission and government employees and individual members of the community.

“It was forbidden for us to talk in our own language. If we had been able we would have retained it ... we weren't allowed to talk about anything that belonged

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<sup>1</sup> [Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples – Parliament of Australia](#)

to our tribal life.” *Pring 1990 page 18 quoting Muriel Olsson, removed to Colebook, South Australia, at the age of 5.*

You can read all written testimonies from the report [here](#).

As we observe the 18th anniversary of the National Apology, it is important to honour both the historical significance of that moment and the ongoing work still required to achieve true reconciliation. This means not only remembering the past but actively engaging with present inequities, in health, education, justice and representation experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In commemorating this milestone, we remember with respect the survivors of the Stolen Generations, their families and communities, and recommit to the shared work of justice, understanding and healing.

At the same time, we reaffirm the Society’s commitment to reconciliation through the First Nations Cultural Outreach Strategy, ensuring the legal profession continues to build capability, foster respectful relationships and advocate for justice and equity. You can read more about the Society’s Cultural Outreach Strategy (COS) [here](#).

Attending the [18<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Apology to the Stolen Generations \(Link-Up\) event](#) at QPAC was a strong reminder that, even nearly twenty years on, the Apology continues to resonate deeply with survivors, families, and communities. Hearing people speak about where they were when the words were first delivered, and how they still carry that moment with them, highlighted both the enduring pain and the ongoing strength within our communities.

Watching the apology video again in that space, gave the moment new weight and reminded me how important acknowledgment, connection, and ongoing healing truly are. If you are yet to see the apology, you can watch it [here](#).