

**Title:** Exploring NAIDOC Week 2024

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**Between Sunday 7 July 2024 to Sunday 14 July 2024, we observe NAIDOC Week – “Keep the Fire Burning! Blak, Loud and Proud!”**

Held annually, NAIDOC Week is a celebration of First Nations culture that has origins going back 86 years.<sup>1</sup>

It is a time to celebrate and recognise the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.<sup>2</sup> It is also a time to reflect upon the continued need to raise awareness and understanding of the importance of Indigenous history and culture.<sup>3</sup>

This year’s NAIDOC theme is “Keep the Fire Burning! Blak, Loud and Proud<sup>4</sup>” It is an unapologetic celebration of Indigenous identity and endeavours to highlight the robust spirit of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.<sup>5</sup>

The reference to fire signifies the resilience and strength of Indigenous cultures.<sup>6</sup> It is also a symbol of their connection to the land, to each other and sharing their cultural heritage.<sup>7</sup> Despite tribulations in the past and the current challenges facing their communities they have passed down and continue to pass down their stories, traditions, and achievements.<sup>8</sup> For that, we all benefit.

The theme is also a call to action and an “amplification of voices.<sup>9</sup>” It asks all Australians to listen, learn, and engage meaningfully with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. By appreciating the history of First Nations peoples, we create understanding and compassion.

Prior to 1920, Aboriginal rights groups boycotted Australia Day (26 January) to protest the status and treatment of Indigenous Australians.<sup>10</sup> In 1924 the Australian Aborigines Progressive Association (AAPA) was formed, followed by the Australian Aborigines

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<sup>1</sup> NAIDOC (2024). NAIDOC History. Retrieved from <https://www.naidoc.org.au/about/history>

<sup>2</sup> Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2024). NAIDOC Week. Retrieved from [https://www.dfat.gov.au/people-to-people/public-diplomacy/indigenous/naidoc-week#:~:text=NAIDOC%20Week%20\(National%20Aboriginal%20and,and%20Torres%20Strait%20Islander%20peoples](https://www.dfat.gov.au/people-to-people/public-diplomacy/indigenous/naidoc-week#:~:text=NAIDOC%20Week%20(National%20Aboriginal%20and,and%20Torres%20Strait%20Islander%20peoples)

<sup>3</sup> NAIDOC (2024). NAIDOC History. Retrieved from <https://www.naidoc.org.au/about/history>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> NAIDOC (2024). NAIDOC Theme. Retrieved from <https://www.naidoc.org.au/about/naidoc-theme>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> National Museum Australia (2022). Defining Moments William Cooper protests. Retrieved from <https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/william-cooper-protests>

League (AAL) in 1932.<sup>11</sup> Both became prominent Indigenous rights groups, however the AAPA ceased operations in 1927 due to increased police harassment.<sup>12</sup>

In 1935, William Cooper the founder of the AAL drafted a petition addressed to King George V, requesting special Aboriginal electorates in the Federal Parliament of Australia.<sup>13</sup> In the petition, Cooper stated that “it was not only a moral duty but also a strict injunction included in the commission issued to those who came to people Australia that the original occupants and, their heirs and successors should be adequately cared for instead our lands have been expropriated.<sup>14</sup>” The petition failed as it “fell outside” of the Government’s constitutional responsibilities.<sup>15</sup>

Cooper was a Yorta Yorta elder and Aboriginal leader in New South Wales and Victoria who lobbied state and federal governments on behalf of Aboriginal people.<sup>16</sup>

Not being solely concerned about the rights of the indigenous community, Cooper led a march to the German consulate in Melbourne on 6 December 1938, to condemn the persecution of the Jewish people by the Nazi government.<sup>17</sup> The German consulate officials refused German officials refused to take the petition, but the protest garnered support from around the world.<sup>18</sup>

Cooper was instrumental in organising the “Day of Mourning” on 26 January 1938 in response to the national sesquicentenary celebrations of the arrival of the British.<sup>19</sup> Protestors marched through the streets of Sydney, followed by a civil rights gatherings attended by over a thousand people.<sup>20</sup>

From 1940 until 1955, the Day of Mourning was held annually on the Sunday before Australia Day.<sup>21</sup> Following that there was wide support for the creation of the National Aborigines Day Observance Committee (NADOC) across, major Aboriginal organisations and state and federal governments.<sup>22</sup> By 1974, the NADOC committee was composed entirely of Aboriginal members, and it was also decided that NAIDOC celebrations should cover a week, from the first to second Sunday in July.<sup>23</sup> Later, NADOC was expanded to recognise Torres Strait Islander people and culture.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> NAIDOC (2024). NAIDOC History. Retrieved from <https://www.naidoc.org.au/about/history>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> National Museum Australia (2022). Defining Moments William Cooper protests. Retrieved from <https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/william-cooper-protests>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> NAIDOC (2024). NAIDOC History. Retrieved from <https://www.naidoc.org.au/about/history>

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

At the core of NAIDOC Week is justice and equality as well as putting a much-needed spotlight on the culture and history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.<sup>25</sup> That culture and history is a much needed and essential component of modern Australia.<sup>26</sup> We must continue to embrace and explore it especially in our workplaces and in the legal community.

Earlier this year, staff at the Society participated in two Aboriginal Art Workshops with Matt and Ambrose from Ngalin Ayeye/Our Yarn to create a painting that incorporates themes of indigenous art to create a welcoming symbol to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community when they visit Law Society House. This allowed staff to expand their connection to community and learn. We are all connected to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and they are connected to our profession. We must continue to embrace and celebrate indigenous culture into our profession to continue the warmth and collegiality amongst peers our industry is known for.

This NAIDOC week, remember that as we are fortunate to live in a nation with the oldest living culture in the world and we all can celebrate and understand the stories, traditions, and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. We must keep the fire burning.

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<sup>25</sup> NAIDOC (2024). NAIDOC Theme. Retrieved from <https://www.naidoc.org.au/about/naidoc-theme>

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.