

# The Australian Women's Register

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**Entry type:** Person  
**Entry ID:** AWE2289

## Peris, Nova Maree

(1971 - )

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**Born** 25 February, 1971, Darwin Northern Territory Australia

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**Occupation** Aboriginal rights activist, Commonwealth or Empire Games Gold Medalist, Hockey player, Olympian, Track and Field Athlete

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### Summary

Nova Peris was the first Aboriginal Australian to win a gold medal at the Olympic Games. She is also one of a very few athletes who have represented their country in two different sports at separate Olympic Games. In 1996 in Atlanta she was a member of the gold medal winning Hockeyroos team. In 2000 at Sydney she made it to the semi finals of the 400 meters track and field event. She is a staunch campaigner for Indigenous rights and reconciliation in Australia.

Nova served in the Australian Senate from November 2013 until May 2016. She was the first Indigenous Australian to serve in Federal Parliament.

### Details

Nova Peris was born in Darwin in 1971 to parents Joan Peris and John Christopherson. From a young age Nova demonstrated great athletic ability, excelling at sports such as basketball, touch football, swimming, hockey, cricket, athletics and Australian Rules.

Nova was the first Indigenous Australian to win an Olympic gold medal, as a member of the Hockeyroos at the Atlanta Olympics (1996). However, from 1997 to 2001, Nova turned her attention to athletics. At the 1998 Commonwealth Games she won two gold medals; one for the 200m and another for the 4x100m relay.

On 8 June 2000 Nova was the first Australian to run with the Sydney Olympic torch on Australian soil. Passed on to her by Indigenous elders, she carried the torch around Uluru with her daughter, Jessica, alongside her. Nova also competed at the Sydney Olympics; she reached the semi-finals of the 400m and was also a member of the 4x400m relay team. In 2005, Nova sold her Olympic Memorabilia to the National Museum of Australia in Canberra

Throughout her career, Nova was the recipient of a number of awards and honours. In 1997 she was awarded both the Young Australian of the Year award and the Medal of the Order of Australia 'for service to sport as a gold medallist in the Atlanta Olympic Games, 1996?'. She also received the Australian Sports Medal in June 2000.

In 2012 Nova established the Nova Peris Girls' Academy (NPGA) at St John's College, Darwin, where the primary focus was to keep Indigenous girls in education. The following year she became the first Indigenous Australian to be elected to the Federal Parliament. Nova announced her retirement from federal politics in 2016.

## Events

### **1996 - 1996**

Member of the Hockeyroos

### **2000 - 2000**

Competed at the Sydney Olympic Games in Athletics

### **2001 - 2001**

Inducted into the Victorian Honour Roll of Women

### **1998 - 1998**

Athletics – 200m Event; 4 x 100m Relay

## Published resources

### **Book**

Nova, My Story: The Autobiography of Nova Peris, Nova Peris, 2003

### **Site Exhibition**

She's Game: Women Making Australian Sporting History, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2007,  
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/sg/sport-home.html>

The Encyclopedia of Women and Leadership in Twentieth-Century Australia, Smart, Judith and Swain, Shurlee (eds.), 2014,  
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders>

### **Resource**

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

## Archival resources

### **National Sport Information Centre**

[Nova Peris File](#)

### **National Museum Australia**

[Nova Peris Collection](#)

### **Author Details**

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