

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Event
Entry ID: IMP0091

Referendum 1967

(1967 -)

Born 27 May, 1967, Australia

Summary

In February 1967, Prime Minister Harold Holt agreed to hold a national referendum in May 1967 as the result of a sustained campaign by the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI) which was agitating for amendments to the constitution. There were two changes proposed, both of which were accepted by a vast majority of voters: (1) to remove a discriminatory clause in Section 51 (xxvi) which had prevented the Federal Government from legislating for Aboriginal people. This clause had meant States could enact their own laws relating to Aboriginal people; in this way Aboriginal people had been discriminated against and excluded from social services under State law; (2) Section 127, which excluded Aboriginal people from being counted in national censuses, was deleted.

Despite legislation enacted on 10 August 1967 as a result of the referendum, the effects of the constitutional changes were not immediate; some States were reluctant to repeal discriminatory laws, and did not do so for many years. The federal government was slow to act on its new powers. The 'yes' vote had also been concentrated in certain areas leaving a substantial 'no' vote in other areas.

The 1967 referendum has nevertheless been mythologised in Australia's history as a high-water-mark of popular support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights, and reflects the sustained efforts of generations of Indigenous advocates.

Sources: Horton (ed), 1994, *Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia*.
McGinness, 1991, 'What FCAATSI fought for'

Published resources

Journal Article

(The) 1967 (Referendum) and all that : narrative and myth, Aborigines and Australia., Attwood, Bain; Markus, Andrew, 1998

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The Commonwealth Referendum of 1967 and Australian Indigenous citizenship : an interpretation of historical events, Tripcony, Penny, 2001

Revitalising citizenship: lessons from the margins. -Paper presented to Citizenship & Indigenous Australians : Changing Conceptions and Possibilities (1996: Canberra), Eggerking, Kitty, 1997

The 1967 referendum, Bennett, Scott, 1985

Edited Book

The Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia : Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, society and culture, Horton, David, 1994

Book Section

Representation matters : the 1967 referendum and citizenship, Attwood, Bain; Markus, Andrew, 1998

Aborigines and the 1967 referendum : thirty years on, Henry Reynolds, 1998

Resource Section

Guide to the Papers of Charles Perkins, National Library of Australia, 2002,
<http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-291812290/findingaid>

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The fair go [videorecording] : winning the 1967 referendum, ABC; Canute Films for the Open Learning Agency of Australia, 1999

The 1967 referendum, or, When Aborigines didn't get the vote, Bain Attwood; Andrew Markus, 1997

1967 [videorecording] : citizens at last, Harvey Broadbent, 1997

Yes, Aborigines do count, 1967-1992 : a publication to mark the 25th anniversary of the 1967 Referendum., 1992

Archival resources

National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection

[Papers of Charles Perkins, 1956-1993 \[manuscript\]](#)

[Papers of Jessie Street, circa 1914-1968 \[manuscript\]](#)

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