

Entry type: Event
Entry ID: IMP0091

Referendum 1967

(1967 -)

Born 19670527, 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*.
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[Papers of Jessie Street, circa 1914-1968 \[manuscript\]](#)

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