NAIDOC Week 2021: Heal Country!

NAIDOC Week celebrates the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It runs from 4-11 July.

All Australians are invited to celebrate NAIDOC Week and it is a great opportunity to learn more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Attend or organise a NAIDOC event in your area. Ideas on how to celebrate NAIDOC Week can be found at naidoc.org.au and there are also resources for classroom lessons on the website.

The NAIDOC 2021 theme is Heal Country! The theme calls for all of us to continue to seek greater protections for our lands, our waters, our sacred sites and our cultural heritage from exploitation, desecration and destruction.

It's a country that is more than a place and inherent to our identity. A country that we speak about like a person, sustaining our lives in every aspect – spiritually, physically, emotionally, socially and culturally.

NAIDOC 2021 invites the nation to embrace First Nations' cultural knowledge and understanding of Country as part of Australia's national heritage and equally respect the culture and values of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders as they do the cultures and values of all Australians.

For generations there have been calls for stronger measures to recognise, protect and maintain all aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and heritage – and the wait for those robust protections continues.

This year's NAIDOC theme seeks substantive institutional, structural and collaborative reform – something generations of Elders and communities have been advocating, marching and fighting for.

Healing Country means finally resolving many of the outstanding injustices which impact on the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

It is about hearing and actioning the aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples which are the culmination of generations of consultation and discussions on a range of issues and grievances.

After 250 years, our children and our future generations deserve better.

We cannot afford to let pass the very real opportunity that now presents itself for reform based on a fundamental change in the relationship Australia has with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Heal Country, heal our nation.

2021 NAIDOC Week poster

Maggie-Jean Douglas – a Gubbi Gubbi artist from South East Queensland – is the winner of the prestigious national NAIDOC poster competition for 2021.

Her entry – Care For Country – was chosen from 260 entries in the national competition.

The 21-year-old artist said her first thoughts on hearing the 2021 NAIDOC theme "Heal Country" was about how country has cared for and healed First Nations people in all senses of the meaning for so long.

"I wanted to create an artwork that told that story and made me hopeful for what's to come in future years," she said.

"When creating Care for Country I kept in mind that this meant spiritually, physically, emotionally, socially and culturally.

"I chose to create a bright and vibrant artwork that included the different colours of the land but showed how they come together in our beautiful country and to make people feel hopeful for the future.

"I've included communities/people, animals and bush medicines spread over different landscapes of red dirt, green grass,

bush land and coastal areas to tell the story of the many ways country can and has healed us throughout our lives and journeys.“

Ms Douglas, who grew up on Goreng Goreng country, currently lives on Ngunnawal Country where she works as an advisor in the Commonwealth public service.

“Appreciating Indigenous art is something that is highly valued within my family, we were always taught that it was a way our people were able to share their stories between generations and now, with people of different cultures,” she said.

“My cultural heritage is something I’m extremely proud of and to be able to express myself through this medium means a lot to me. Telling my own stories and the stories of others is something I find deeply valuable because of the impact it can have.”

Ms Douglas has also been commissioned for artworks for the Pharmacy Guild of Australia Queensland branch and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s Office of the Pacific. In 2020, she won the Ruby Olive Jewellery Women for Women lanyard design competition.

Each year, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists aged 13 years or older are invited to submit an entry to the national NAIDOC poster competition.

The winning entry is awarded a $10,000 cash prize and the artwork recognised across the country on the national NAIDOC poster.

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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