Reconciliation requires more than words

National Reconciliation Week (NRW) is marked every year from 27 May – 3 June. It is an opportunity for Australians to learn and reflect upon our shared histories, culture and achievements and our part to play in achieving reconciliation in Australia.

The dates for NRW also commemorate key milestones in reconciliation in Australia, the successful 1967 referendum (27 May) and the 1992 High Court Mabo decision (3 June).

National Reconciliation Week started as the Week of Prayer for Reconciliation in 1993 (the International Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples) and was supported by Australia's major faith communities.

In 1996, the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation launched Australia's first NRW. In 2000, Reconciliation Australia was established to continue to provide national leadership on reconciliation.

In the same year, approximately 300,000 people walked across Sydney Harbour Bridge as part of NRW, to show their support for reconciliation.

Today, NRW is celebrated by businesses, schools and early learning services, organisations, and individuals Australia- wide.

NRW 2021 theme

The theme for NRW 2021 is More than a word. Reconciliation takes action, which urges the reconciliation movement towards braver and more impactful action.

We are seeing more people speaking up, speaking the truth, asking the hard questions, seeing the hard facts, and informing themselves about issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The 2021 theme calls on others to follow their lead by reflecting on their own contributions and striving to do more.

NRW 2021 artwork

This year's NRW artwork has been produced by artist Jessica Johnson, a descendent of the Warumungu/Wombaya people north of Tennant Creek.

Born on Larrakia Country, Jessica spent her formative years among the diverse community of Canberra on Ngambri/ Ngunnawal Country.

Now residing in Sydney, Gadigal country, Jessica is an established designer, artist and owner of Nungala Creative.

Her work often reflects the nostalgia of her youth, an era of passionate united community committed to realising equality and justice for First Nations peoples.

Jessica attributes much of her creative practice to her late father who was a contemporary Aboriginal artist and a political activist. She belongs to an extended creative family who use art through all aspects of life.

As an artist, Jessica works across mediums and methodologies. Renowned for her experimental aesthetic, Jessica uses her work to address issues of injustice and celebrate culture and people through her recognisably bright positive aesthetic.

The artwork reflects our connection and mutual obligation to one another, community and country. Through commonality and difference, we have the ability to come together and achieve real change.

National Sorry Day

NRW is preceded by National Sorry Day on 26 May, which remembers and acknowledges the mistreatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people forcibly removed from their families and communities, which is now known as the "Stolen Generation."

National Sorry Day is a day to acknowledge the strength of Stolen

Generations survivors and reflect on how we can all play a part in the healing process for our people and nation. While this date carries great significance for the Stolen Generations and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, it is also commemorated by Australians right around the country.

We cannot begin to fix the problems of the present without accepting the truth of our history. Sorry Day asks us to acknowledge the Stolen Generations, and in doing so, reminds us that historical injustice is still an ongoing source of intergenerational trauma for Aboriginal and Torres Islander families, communities and peoples.

Moving forward

For reconciliation to be effective, it must involve truth-telling, and actively address issues of inequality, systemic racism and instances where the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are ignored, denied or reduced.

While there is greater support for reconciliation from the Australian people than ever before, we must be more determined than ever if we are to achieve a just, equitable, reconciled Australia.

As history tells us, this will only happen through continued and concerted action from those who are already part of the reconciliation movement to those who are yet to join.

Moving towards a braver reconciliation requires a vision for what a just, equitable and reconciled Australia looks like.

Reconciliation must live in the hearts, minds and actions of all Australians as we move forward, creating a nation strengthened by respectful relationships between the wider Australian community, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

For more information visit reconciliation.org.au

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
ABN 54 478 094 635 © 2026