

# Seeing the Con in reconciliation

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Nearly every year, on Sorry Day, I will click on that saved link I have of a Territory Stories webpage, download the audio file and listen [to my nanna's voice](#) recalling her experiences as a stolen child in the NT during the 1930s. Nanna passed away quite a while ago now so it's pretty amazing to be able to click and hear her voice whenever I like. But it's also a reminder of the horrors she, and so many other Aboriginal kids, endured at the hands of various governments. There may have been a national Apology, but can we honestly say Australia has rectified the [wrongs when more children](#) are being taken than ever before?



Sorry Day happens the day before what is known as '[Reconciliation Week](#)'. Sorry Day itself marks the tabling in Parliament of the [Bringing them Home](#) report in 1997 — marking the end of an inquiry into the many laws and practices across the country which led to the Stolen Generations. Reconciliation week itself begins on the 27<sup>th</sup> May, the anniversary of the [1967 Referendum](#) that granted Aboriginal people the right to be counted in the census. The anniversary of the [Mabo 3 ruling](#) in the High Court rounds out the week.

Yet every year, I would swear that this week means nothing more to most people in this country than to call on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in their workplaces and community to do more work. I wish it were a remembrance of these important dates and why they should be days which spark pride in the average 'Australian', but instead it seems to be an opportunity to ask Indigenous folks what 'reconciliation' means to us and then call on us to educate them on stuff they will then neglect to do for the next 12 months.

It's also not surprising when I see Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people respond that they think the notion of 'reconciliation' is a mere con. Or they feel it's a remnant from the Howard years when he tried to [water down our political movements](#). Or they ask 'why is it us that are called upon to reconcile when we did nothing?' I have met a handful in my time that speak more positively about the notion of reconciliation, talking about opportunities for 'honest conversations', 'justice' and 'coming together'. But in the main, I think most are disillusioned.

When I think about the hype around reconciliation week, it reminds me of being a kid during 1988 when we were told that the Bicentennial celebrations were for us too. They weren't, and mostly our inclusion ended up being tokenistic. What was more important was what we were conveying on the streets as we marched, first in [Sydney on the 26<sup>th</sup> January](#), and then in Canberra in May, yelling 'land rights now!' We're still yelling those words, 22 years later. So what then therefore does the notion of 'reconciliation' actually mean?

We don't have 'land rights', just native title and that counts for little when mining companies are blowing up some of the [most ancient sites in the world](#) with a mere 'whoops'. Even then, what Mabo fought for, and won, has not been embraced in the public consciousness. Does anyone truly believe the 'terra nullius' mindset has left this country? Because I'm not seeing evidence of this every time the 26<sup>th</sup> of January rolls around, or every time Reconciliation Week happens and days as important as this aren't recognised as public holidays yet the AFL Grand Final warrants a day off, as does the Queen.

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We haven't even managed to capture the spirit of the 1967 referendum when at least people recognised that Aboriginal people were worthy of being considered human beings. If we were then why is Australia seemingly okay with the disproportionate level of policing Aboriginal people have been experiencing during the COVID-19 crisis where [community people can't even drive 2kms](#) to the nearest shop without being arrested.

It was the play [The 7 Stages of Grieving](#) that first alerted me to the 'con' in the middle of 'reconciliation' and cemented it in my brain. Truth is, as an Aboriginal woman, Reconciliation Week in Australia does come across as a bit of a con. Years pass yet things stay the same.

There has been an opportunity here for a long time to recognise some gains this country has made and truths it has told so that we move forward to a healthy, more equal, future. When you consider the Referendum, Mabo and the Stolen Generations, all of these were rooted in recognising some painful truths and trying to make them right. Yet the reality is beyond rehashing the photo of the Harbour Bridge walk in 2000, which many see as a visual representation of reconciliation, we don't witness change actually rolling out.

Perhaps, in this COVID-19 time, where reaching out and building community is more important than ever, it's time?

From Eureka Street