



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

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Launching of the International Year of the World's Indigenous People *

1993 has been declared the International Year of the World's Indigenous People (IYWIP) by the United Nations. The major objectives of the IYWIP are to increase international co-operation in finding solutions to the problems faced by the world's 300 million indigenous people and to promote and encourage respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms throughout the world.

The International Year was launched in New York on 10 December 1992. At the launch, the Chairperson of ATSIC, Miss Lois O'Donoghue, CBE, AM, addressed the United Nations where, among other things, she called for Torres Strait Islanders to gain some form of self-government. Accompanying Miss O'Donoghue on stage at the UN was ATSIC Commissioner and TSIAB Chairperson Mr George Mye, MBE.

The Australian launch of IYWIP took place in Redfern Park, Sydney. In an historic speech the Prime Minister, Mr Paul Keating, called upon non-indigenous Australians to recognise that it was they "who did the dispossessing".

Among others who spoke at the launch was Ms Dulcie Flower, who delivered a speech on behalf of Torres Strait Islander Australians.

She identified the relationship to their land and the sea as being the common ground between Torres Strait Islanders and Aborigines.

Ms Flower welcomed the focus on indigenous people in 1993 and said she hoped that this focus would continue, thus offering a better future for the generations to come.

The full text of Ms Flower's speech can be found pages ten and eleven.

Also involved in International Year activities is Ms Eleanor Harding, a member of the TSIAB, who was nominated as the Advisory Board's representative of the National Committee of The International Year of the World's Indigenous People.

* Reprinted courtesy of the Torres Strait Island Advisory Board *TSAB Newsletter* No.1. for further information contact: The Manager - Office of Torres Strait Islander Affairs - P.O.Box17 - Woden - ACT - 2606. Ph. (06) 289 8851

Prime Minister, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Acting ATSIC Chairperson, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I have been asked to represent the Torres Strait Islander people at this launch of the International Year of the World's Indigenous People and, for me, this is a great honour.

Torres Strait Islanders welcome the focus on the world's indigenous people during the next 12 months, and it is our wish that this focus will continue as strongly as it is today for many years to come as we all strive to prepare a better future for our children and future generations.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have different and distinctive cultures, but we also have many things in common. Paramount is our relationship to our land—the very core of our existence.

Aboriginal people led the way in the struggle for land ownership. The Meriam people of the Torres Strait overturned the doctrine of terra nullius.

Mr Eddie Mabo—Koiki as he was known to family and friends—unrelentingly pursued what he knew and felt deep in his heart: his rights as an indigenous person. Koiki's wish was for all indigenous people in this country to be regarded legally as the rightful owners of their lands.

The sea is an important daily aspect of the lives of our people in the Torres Strait and it is as vital to us as the Islands themselves for our survival—spiritually and physically.

We ask that you listen to the pleas of Torres Strait Islanders concerning mining and shipping operations in the Torres Strait region. If these operations are not strictly monitored, then there is the possibility of the waters throughout the Torres Strait and around Cape York being polluted and the Aboriginal people in this region—who also depend on the sea as part of their staple diet—will share the same plight as Torres Strait Islanders.

A large proportion of Torres Strait Islander people have moved to the mainland in search of employment, housing and education for their children.

Torres Strait Islanders have fought in World War II and were employed by the American Navy as divers in Hawaii.

Torres Strait Islanders set — and still maintain— a world record in laying the railway line from Port Hedland to Mount Newman in Western Australia.

Many Torres Strait Islanders have worked alongside Aboriginal people to establish medical, legal, women's and other services. We are also many trades and professions.

Our young people are students in schools of dance and theatre and are making their contributions towards keeping our culture alive.

Along with Aboriginal people, we are still in need of education and—specifically in the Islands—access to better health care. Our people suffer from Diabetes Type One, leading to amputation of limbs.

We anticipate in this coming year that we will have better access to those programs which will afford us the basic necessities of life. The Australian Government has taken important initiatives in recognising Torres Strait Islander people:

- by our inclusion in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission; and*
- our Minister is now known as the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs.*

For the first time in recent history we have rejoiced in our new-found status. But we realise that this is only the first step. We have a long way to go in our struggle.

The International Year of the World's Indigenous People will be an important period for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians to negotiate with Government in the world spotlight.

We support the implementation of policies and programs which will restore the Indigenous peoples of Australia and throughout the world to their rightful place in their own countries.

Torres Strait Islander people are asking that you join our hands in friendship. We have much to offer and share: our histories, stories, songs, dances, food, arts— our culture.

A fire burns within our people and our struggle will be continued from a new and sturdy horizon—we will not be held back. Thank you.