



# Dialogues

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE WORLD

Thursday 25 September 2003

## Australia's Indigenous People

The ANU Dialogue *Australia's Indigenous People* is jointly presented by the ANU Institute for Indigenous Australia, the Australian Indigenous Studies Program at the University of Melbourne and the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.



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## Program

- 3.30pm Introduction and Welcome**  
Professor Ian Chubb AO  
President and Vice-Chancellor  
The Australian National University
- 3.40pm Welcome to Country**  
Mrs Matilda House  
Ngunnawal Elder
- 3.45pm Presentation**  
Professor Mick Dodson  
Professor of Indigenous Studies  
Convenor, ANU Institute for Indigenous Australia  
The Australian National University  
  
Professor Marcia Langton  
Chair of Indigenous Studies  
University of Melbourne
- 4.30pm Questions and answers and discussion**
- 5pm Presentation of Information Folders**  
Mr Russell Taylor  
Principal, Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
- 5.10pm Hospitality**
- 6.30pm Conclusion**

*Didgeridoo players Mr Warren Ganter and Mr Lewis Langton*

## Australia's Indigenous People

Australia has been home for human populations for at least 40,000 years. Archaeologists and prehistorians argue that during the Pleistocene period, before the last glacial age, people arrived on this continent from Asia, after island hopping across the archipelago that is now called Indonesia.

Aboriginal peoples on the mainland today are the descendants of these early Australian human populations who established societies that have left evidence of the oldest known art record, human burials and religious practices in the world. The Torres Strait Islanders established their society in the Torres Strait region at the northern-most tip of Queensland, it is believed, about 10,000 years ago.

The six colonies established by the British from 1788 onwards each separately dealt with the Aboriginal populations until 1901 when the colonies became federated as the States that we know today under the new Constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia. The Northern Territory was separated from South Australia in 1911 and was granted self-government in 1978. The Australian Capital Territory was granted self-government in 1989.



The impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples throughout the colonial period was profound. The populations were radically reduced by violence, epidemics and social disruption caused by repressive state regimes that incarcerated large parts of the Indigenous population as 'wards of the State' in Crown reserves or other types of institutions.

The denial of even basic citizenship rights to Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders came to an end in the late 1960s. Over 90 per cent of Australians voted in a Constitutional Referendum in 1967 to include Aboriginal people in the national population census and to remove the relevant racist provision from the Australian Constitution. The States then, one by one, enfranchised Indigenous people, while other limited rights were granted in the following decades.

Since the arrival of European settlers in 1788, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have struggled for recognition of their basic rights as Indigenous people. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history in Australia has many stories of conflicts and struggles for recognition and respect. There have been some gains and there continue to be some significant losses.

Professors Mick Dodson and Marcia Langton are leading academics and highly respected elders amongst Australia's Indigenous people. Their presentations will include an historical perspective and an overview of current issues. In particular, they will discuss the issues arising from the recognition of native title rights and interests by the High Court of Australia in 1992; the impact of the forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families during most of the twentieth century (the 'stolen generation'); and the struggle for the rights of Australia's Indigenous people to self-governance.