



The Pilbara and Kimberley regions

Aboriginal Peoples live in 'two worlds'. They maintain connections to their traditional Lands, waters, cultural practices and protocols, while also navigating the Western world.

Colonisation and subsequent government policies aimed at protection and assimilation have affected Aboriginal Peoples' lives since the 1800s. The establishment of vast pastoral leases over their Lands had severe impacts on their rights as traditional landowners. Many were sent to Rottnest Island Prison for killing and stealing cattle and sheep. Others were forced into labour in the pearling industry and died as far away as the Pilbara coast.

Station owners took advantage of the cultural and spiritual connection Aboriginal Peoples had to their Land – and their need to stay on the Land – and made them work for little or no wages. They endured this because they couldn't bear the thought of leaving their Land, which they considered family. In the Pilbara, it was common practice to forcibly keep Aboriginal people on pastoral stations until the 1946 strike for fair wages and better working conditions.

Legislation was enforced that had far-reaching impacts on the wellbeing of Aboriginal Peoples. This included the forced removal of children, who were sent to missions, set up by the government and church groups, including Jigalong in the Pilbara and Beagle Bay in the Kimberley. For more information on missions, visit the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies' (AIATSIS) Mission and reserve records: <https://aiatsis.gov.au/family-history/family-history-sources/official-records/mission-and-reserve-records>

Children removed from their families became known as the Stolen Generations. They sought to reconnect with their families, identity, cultures, Countries and sense of belonging.

Families were also moved from their Country on to Aboriginal reserves, usually located on the margins of towns. Intergenerational trauma continues to affect Aboriginal communities. For more information about the Stolen Generations and intergenerational trauma, check out the Healing Foundation's resources here: <https://healingfoundation.org.au/>

Aboriginal Peoples' place in Australia has only been legally recognised since 1967. This is a very short timeframe in which they have had to accommodate Western culture.



Over time, increased self-determination and empowerment opportunities have enabled progressive steps to be taken. Policy changes are leading towards the delivery of better outcomes for recognition, justice, equity, employment, training, education, health and housing.

Aboriginal Peoples continue to connect with their families, and each other, to fight for recognition of ownership through Native Title Claims and compensation for the destruction of Lands through mining leases.

With this historical context in mind, it's important to work with Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers, Aboriginal Teaching Assistants, families, caregivers and communities to ensure schools are culturally aware and responsive, trauma-informed and welcoming.

The Be You Cultural Actions Catalogue has been developed with communities across the Pilbara and Kimberley to help educators identify short and long-term actions to create inclusive and respectful learning communities that embrace the history and cultures of these regions.

*“We need to focus on survival and celebrate the strength of connection we are finding again.”
- Jigalong community member*

