



This month marks the 40th anniversary of one of the most defining events of Aboriginal Australian history – the 1967 Referendum.

The 1967 Referendum is often referred to as the beginning of the reconciliation movement in this country.

On Sunday, May 27, 1967, over 90 per cent of Australians voted Yes in a national referendum (a vote put to the public to decide an important matter) that asked whether

The 1967 Referendum was a result of long-standing campaign by the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders to make changes to the Australian constitution.

Although it took many years for the constitutional changes to take effect – with some States being unwilling to change their discriminatory laws – and although it has taken many more years of action by Aboriginal activists for the Federal Government to recognise the rights of

Australia says YES!



Indigenous Australians, the 1967 Referendum remains a shining example of how Indigenous and non-Indigenous people can work together to bring about change.

The Referendum was also a crowning achievement for many generations of Aboriginal activists, who fought long and hard for recognition and change.

Important lessons can be learned from these proud people. Their hard work proves that change is possible, and that by standing together, black and white Australians can work towards equality in health, education and employment. By following the examples set by the heroes of the Referendum, we too can do our bit to make a difference.

changes should be made to the constitution that discriminated against Indigenous Australians. These changes would give the Commonwealth Government specific powers to make laws for Aboriginal people and to take account of Aboriginal people when determining the population of Australia.





PREPARATION BEFORE READING

This report reflects on the 40th anniversary of the 1967 referendum as one of the most important events of Aboriginal Australian history. This event is often referred to as the beginning of the reconciliation movement.

The referendum saw more than 90% of eligible Australians vote YES to count Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in the national census of the population and to give the Commonwealth Government power to make specific laws in respect of Indigenous people.

Members of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders campaigned to change the Australian Constitution which stated that Aboriginal people could not vote in national elections and were not counted in the national census.

The referendum was an important achievement for many generations of Aboriginal activists who fought for recognition and change.

ACTIVITY 1: READ AUSTRALIA SAYS YES! ON PAGE 4

Scanning for specific information

1. What occurred on May 27, 1967?

2. What does a "referendum" mean?

3. What were the two changes made to the Australian Constitution as a result of the referendum?

4. Which organisation campaigned to hold the referendum?



5. Did the changes take effect immediately?

YES NO

What were some reasons for this?

6. What is the main purpose for writing this report?

ACTIVITY 2: EFFECTS OF THE REFERENDUM

1. In what ways can the 1967 referendum be seen as “the beginning of the reconciliation movement in Australia”?

2. What important lessons can be learned from the work of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous activists involved in the referendum campaign?

**ACTIVITY 3: WOMEN CAMPAIGNING FOR
INDIGENOUS RIGHTS****Jessie Street**

Source: National Archives of Australia

Born in India in 1889, Jessie Street was the eldest of the three children of Mabel Ogilvie and Charles Lillingston. Her childhood was spent in India, England, and in Australia. She campaigned for equality of status for women, equal pay, appointment of women to public office and their election to parliament.

After her marriage to Kenneth Street, the couple settled in Sydney where Jessie Street was prominent in the women's citizenship campaigns of the 1920s and 1930s. In the 1940s, she was working in the Australian Women's Charter movement and worked to ensure that advancing the status of Indigenous Australians was a core principle of the Charter.

In 1957, she campaigned for a referendum for including Aboriginal people on the census. She circulated a petition, which was read in the House of Representatives.

She is recognised both in Australia and internationally for her activism in women's rights, social justice and peace.

www.nma.gov.au/indigenoustrights/



1. Fill in the grid below to explain key events in Jessie Street's life.

Jessie Street

Year	Key Event
1989	Where she was born
	Where she spent her childhood
1920s, 1930s	Campaigns for women's rights
1940s	Australian Women's Charter Movement
1957	Referendum campaign
1970	Died
	Why she is remembered



Faith Bandler

(1919) Source: Smoke Signals, May 1964

Faith Bandler is well known for her active role in publicising the YES case for the Aboriginal question in the 1967 Referendum.

She was born Faith Mussing at Tumbulgum in northern New South Wales in 1919, one of eight children. Her father was a South Sea Islander.

Bandler grew up with her family on a farm near Murwillumbah, New South Wales. Her father died in 1924, when Bandler was just five years old. In 1934, Bandler left school and moved to Sydney, where she worked as a dressmaker's apprentice.

Faith met Lady Jessie Street through her involvement in the peace movement in the late 1940s. She established, with Pearl Gibbs and others, a new organisation to work for Aboriginal rights, the Sydney-based Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship. This multi-racial organisation began in 1956 and was Bandler's political base for the next 13 years.

In 1967, Bandler was appointed New South Wales director of the referendum campaign. She argued that a YES vote was a vote for equal rights for Aboriginal citizens. Bandler wanted to see Aboriginal Australians accepted as equals, and as 'one people' with white Australians.

From 1970, Faith Bandler was the General Secretary of Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI).

www.nma.gov.au/indigenousrights/



2. Fill in the grid below to explain key events in Faith Bandler's life.

Faith Bandler

Year	Key Event
1919 -1940s	Where she was born Early life
late 1940s	Involvement with Lady Jessie Street
1956	Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship
1967	Referendum campaign
1970	Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI)
	Why she is remembered

For more information about Australians who have campaigned for Indigenous rights, head to <http://www.reconciliation.org.au>