



## MEDIA RELEASE

25<sup>th</sup> May 2022

### **Sorry Day 2022 marks two significant anniversaries and a call for long overdue compensation**

At this year's Sorry Day Commemoration on 26<sup>th</sup> May, we will be marking the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the repeal of Western Australia's Native Welfare Act 1963 and 25 years since the tabling of the landmark report into the Stolen Generations, the "Bringing Them Home Report".

"It is important for people to understand that this discriminatory legislation was still in force when I was removed from my family and sent to Marribank Mission in 1970 at the age of 3! I was not allowed to leave the Mission until I turned 16 and it took me many years to reunite with some of my family. We are not talking about ancient history here!", according to Bringing Them Home WA Co-Chair, Tony Hansen.

"It is also important to understand that in Western Australia in particular, the impact of these policies and legislation such as the Native Welfare Act, was significant. Recent research by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has shown that approximately 57% of the Adult Aboriginal population in WA are either Stolen Generations Survivors like me or are descendants!"

Jim Morrison, the Chair of the Western Australian Stolen Generations Aboriginal Corporation, has highlighted the significant unfinished business from the Bringing Them Home Report.

"Only a handful of the 54 recommendations in the Bringing Them Home Report have been properly implemented by Commonwealth or State Governments! The recommendations fall under 3 broad headings – Truth, Justice and Healing and they need to be considered as part of an integrated package and not cherry picked by Governments. We need to tell the Truth about these policies of child removal and their impact on Aboriginal families and we need to provide proper justice and healing for Stolen Generations Survivors and their families!"

"Whilst most States have implemented compensation schemes that are broadly consistent with Recommendations 3 and 4 in the Bringing Them Home Report, sadly this has not happened in Western Australia! Consequently, we are launching a Petition to the Legislative Council on the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Bringing Them Home Report calling for an Inquiry into Compensation Schemes established in other States with a view to establishing a similar scheme in this State."

Mark Bin Bakar, the Chairperson of the Kimberley Stolen Generations Aboriginal Corporation, which will be celebrating its 21<sup>st</sup> Anniversary later this year concluded by saying, "We are looking to the broader community to support this online petition to demonstrate to the WA Government that there is strong support to put in place a proper compensation scheme for the Stolen Generations Survivors who suffered significant trauma as a result of their removal from their families and disconnection from their culture and country. He called on the Government to listen to the words of Midnight Oil – 'the time has come to say fairs fair!"

## Background:

**The Native Welfare Act 1963** was repealed on 9 June 1972. It was part of a series of WA Government race-based legislative acts commencing in 1887, under which thousands of Aboriginal children were removed from their families and placed in state institutions, missions, and foster homes.

The Native Welfare Act 1963 replaced the Aborigines Act 1905, which had remained law from 1906 to 1964. Under the six decades of this latter act, the government's Chief Protector of Aborigines — the most infamous and long-standing of who was A.O. Neville — and later Commissioner of Native Affairs, ruled almost every aspect of the lives of Aboriginal people in Western Australia.

Indigenous people were subjected to forced cultural assimilation, continuing dispossession of Country, denial of basic civil rights, racial segregation, internment in oppressive and resource-deprived church missions and government settlements, and psychological and physical abuse.

The First Nations peoples in Western Australia, as for the those across the continent, were denied self-determination, cultural autonomy, political power, and treaty-negotiating authority.

As the legal guardian of every Aboriginal child, the Chief Protector and Commissioner had the power to forcibly remove children, confine them in institutions, put them to menial work and deny them access to their family and kin.

On top of the terrible grief and trauma of separation, many children suffered cruelty, sexual abuse and strict repression of their language, culture, and identity.

While the Native Welfare Act 1963 ended the legal guardianship of Aboriginal children by the Commissioner of Native Welfare, the program of child removals and social assimilation continued under it, until it was repealed on 9 June 1972. From that point on, state practices in relation Aboriginal children were assigned to mainstream welfare departments along with institutions into which children were placed. The separation of children from their families up to the present day, continues to be an issue of deep concern for Indigenous people, as does the enormous intergenerational trauma caused by the many decades of the destruction of families.

**The Bringing Them Home Report** was tabled in the Federal Parliament on 26<sup>th</sup> May 1997 after an extensive Inquiry conducted by the late Sir Ronald Wilson and respected Aboriginal Lawyer, Mick Dodson. It is now 25 years since that report was provided to the Federal Government and sadly most of the 54 recommendations have not been implemented. For detailed background:

[Bringing them Home Report \(1997\) | Australian Human Rights Commission](#)  
[Bringing-Them-Home-20-years-on-FINAL-SCREEN-1.pdf \(healingfoundation.org.au\)](#)

**For further comment:**

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## Suggestions for further reading:

WASGAC/BTHC/ Yokai websites

*Bringing Them Home Report*, Australian Human Rights Commission, 1997

WA Legislation: <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/guide/wa/WE00423>

*Follow the Rabbit Proof Fence*, by Doris Pilkington, University of Queensland Press, 1996

*Wandering Girl* by Glenyse Ward, Fawcett, 1992

*God, the Devil and Me* by Alf Taylor, Magabala Books, 2022

*Broken Circles: Fragmenting Indigenous Families 1800-2000* by Anna Haebich, Fremantle Press, 2001

*Spinning the Dream: Assimilation in Australia 1950-1970* by Anna Haebich, Fremantle Press, 2008