



**The Hon. Scott Morrison MP**  
Prime Minister

**TRANSCRIPT**  
**STATEMENT ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE NATIONAL APOLOGY TO THE**  
**STOLEN GENERATIONS**  
**AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENT HOUSE, ACT**  
**MONDAY 15 FEBRUARY 2021**

Eo&e...

**PRIME MINISTER:** Thank you Mr Speaker,

We gather to mark the anniversary this past weekend of the Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples.

And we do so here, in the Parliament on Ngunnawal land.

It is fitting we do this here in this place where the Apology was given and the place which free people believe can embody a nation's best hopes.

Today, as we reflect, we first give honour.

I honour the local custodians, the Ngunnawal people and the first peoples across this great continent.

I thank them - and their elders, past, present and emerging, for 65,000 years of continuous stewardship of our land.

I honour the Minister for Indigenous Australians, and the Shadow Minister for Indigenous Australians both of whom are making history here in this House.

Amidst the cut and thrust of this vibrant Chamber, we all share a deep respect for their journeys to this place - and the contribution that they make.

I also honour Senator Patrick Dodson, and Senator McCarthy, Senator Thorpe and Senator Lambie.

Every one of you is a testimony of resilience and strength, and a reminder of the journey our country is making.

And I honour the Indigenous Leaders who have joined us - and representatives from the Stolen Generations whom I met with earlier today. Wonderful people with very powerful stories.

It is 13 years since Kevin Rudd, the Prime Minister gave an apology on behalf of the nation in this very place.

There is nothing special about that number.

In the span of the 65,000 years of Indigenous habitation of this continent, it's a heartbeat.

But nations are a living continuum of past, present and future.

In all of us, the loves, losses and traumas of our past, live on in us.

They linger, they have their own life, and they are passed on.

Nations, too, try to make sense of their past - to reconcile it - with truth, justice and with one another.

As Sir William Dean said a quarter of a century ago "true reconciliation ... is not achievable in the absence of acknowledgment by the nation of the wrongfulness of past dispossession, oppression and degradation of the Aboriginal peoples".

Earlier today, I found some quiet time to reread parts of Bringing Them Home.

Children forcibly removed from parents.

Mothers chasing after police cars that had taken their children.

Siblings separated.

Adoptions without consent.

Forced servitude.

Welfare institutions - cruel - devoid of warmth, love or care.

Parents searching for lost children.

Grief.

Trauma.

Endless pain that cascaded through generations.

All actioned by the state.

A state that seized absolute control over Aboriginal people's lives: where they could live, where they could travel, who they could marry, and what children, if any, they could raise.

Actions of brute force carried out under claims of 'good intentions', but in truth betrayed the ignorance of arrogance, 'knowing better than our Indigenous peoples'.

In acknowledging that fact, I repeat the words of my predecessor, Mr Rudd: I am sorry.

Truly sorry.

Mr Speaker, in past years, we have on this anniversary reported on our efforts to improve the life expectancy, health, education, and economic outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

But, as with so much that had been tried before, our efforts were based more on telling than listening. More on grand aspirations than the experience of Indigenous peoples.

So while there was no lack of money, will or work, our targets were unmet.

And while there was some progress, our ambitions were unfulfilled.

Mostly, it was because we were perpetuating, the very idea that has plagued our country for so long - that we knew better.

We had to move in partnership.

And so, in July last year, we signed a new National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

An agreement reached through a historic partnership between Australian governments and Indigenous peak organisations.

A new chapter in our efforts – one built on mutual trust, respect and dignity.

It not only sets new targets – it changes how we achieve them, and who's driving them.

Following this momentous achievement, all governments and the Coalition of Peaks will deliver their implementation plans in the middle of this year—twelve months on from the National Agreement.

And from here on, reporting on our national progress will occur mid year, but my hope is that this anniversary will remain a poignant reminder in our national life and parliamentary calendar as it should.

Mr Speaker, as we recall what happened in this chamber - and in the life of our nation 13 years ago, we should also remind ourselves of the hope of that day.

After Mr Rudd and Dr Nelson had spoken, Aunty Lorraine Peeters, a member of the Stolen Generations, presented the Parliament with a gift.

Think about that - a gift after being wronged.

The gift was a coolamon.

The coolamon carries newborns.

It carries life itself. The future. And with it, our hopes.

The coolamon was accompanied with a message “On behalf of our people, thank you for saying sorry”.

What grace. And hope. The message went on to say:

“We have a new covenant between our peoples, that we will do all that we can to make sure our children are carried forward, loved and nurtured and able to live a full life”.

Mr Speaker, on this anniversary, we reaffirm that new covenant and that shared hope.

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