Bringing Them Home

The landmark 1997 report, its findings, and what happened next

A note before you read. This read refers to events and policies that may be distressing, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers. Please take care as you read, and stop or take a break whenever you need to. If you would like to yarn with someone, support is available through 13YARN on 13 92 76, Lifeline on 13 11 14, and your local Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service.

The inquiry, and how it was conducted

Bringing Them Home is the landmark 1997 report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families. It was commissioned by the Australian Government in 1995 and conducted by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, now the Australian Human Rights Commission. The inquiry was led by Sir Ronald Wilson and Mick Dodson.

The inquiry drew on testimony from hundreds of people who had been removed as children, along with evidence from families, communities and organisations, and government and church records spanning decades. For many people, it was the first time their story had been heard and formally recorded. The report gave the Stolen Generations a national voice and reshaped the path toward truth-telling, healing and reconciliation.

Key facts

The report remains a cornerstone of truth-telling in Australia.

Tabled in Parliament	26 May 1997, now marked each year as National Sorry Day.
Commissioned	1995, by the Australian Government.
Conducted by	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.
Length	689 pages.
Recommendations	54, including a formal national apology.

What the inquiry found

The inquiry found that between one in ten and one in three First Nations children were forcibly removed from their families between 1910 and 1970. It documented removals across every state and territory, carried out under law and policy rather than in response to individual neglect.

One of the most significant findings was that the removals met the definition of genocide under international law, because they were intended to destroy the cultural identity of a group. This was a serious legal finding, and it changed how the removals could be understood and discussed.

The recommendations and the reparations framework

The report made 54 recommendations. Its central recommendation was a formal national apology, and it set out a five-part framework for reparations, drawing on international principles. The five parts are acknowledgement and apology, guarantees against repetition, measures of restitution, measures of rehabilitation, and monetary compensation.

This framework matters because it recognises that healing requires more than words alone. Alongside an apology, it calls for the underlying causes to be addressed, for support and services that help people heal, and for records and reconnection so that families can find one another again.

The response, and what happened next

The central recommendation, a formal national apology, was delivered on 13 February 2008, when the Prime Minister delivered the National Apology to the Stolen Generations in the Australian Parliament. It was a moment of national significance and a step forward in truth-telling.

Many of the report's other recommendations continue to be pursued. Listening to survivors, supporting reconnection to family, culture and Country, and marking National Sorry Day and Reconciliation Week are all ways that organisations and communities keep this work alive. Bringing Them Home remains a foundation for respectful, trauma aware practice today.

Questions to reflect on

- Why was the genocide finding under international law so significant?
- How does the five-part reparations framework show that healing requires more than words?
- How does your organisation mark National Sorry Day on 26 May?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ Bringing Them Home is the 1997 report of the national inquiry into child removals.
- ✓ It found that removals met the international legal definition of genocide.
- ✓ It made 54 recommendations, including a formal national apology and a five-part reparations framework.
- ✓ The National Apology was delivered in 2008, and many recommendations are still being pursued.

Reference material

- **Bringing Them Home report, Australian Human Rights Commission**
  humanrights.gov.au
- **The Healing Foundation**
  healingfoundation.org.au
- **AIATSIS, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies**
  aiatsis.gov.au
- **Reconciliation Australia**
  reconciliation.org.au

How Emus Talking can help

Emus Talking is a proudly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned business. We help organisations build culturally safe workplaces and strong partnerships, delivered remotely and virtually right across Australia, or in person by arrangement.

Mitch Amidy · mitch@emustalking.com.au · 0404 232 621 · sales@emustalking.com.au

Emus Talking Pty Ltd does not provide financial advice. This information is general in nature and should not be relied upon as a substitute for professional advice tailored to your circumstances.