

## F.A.Q. Answers to the questions ABC Indigenous units are asked.

ABC Indigenous Programs Unit in TV, Radio and Online over the years have been asked questions that often need to be answered in a way to dispel the myths and misnomers surrounding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples in this country. Many questions are asked in ignorance and we hope that the answers will help people to understand the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island cultures.

### **Q: Why don't you look Aboriginal?**

**A:** Well firstly not all Indigenous Australians look the same. We come from diverse backgrounds, just like people from other countries do. For instance, while one of us might come from the hot, dusty red plains of the Northern Territory, another might come from a coastal community which relies heavily on seafood for their diet. Secondly, what with the European influence in our society, Aboriginality is now very much a sense of identity. And due to colonisation, or as some Indigenous people call it *invasion*, mixed marriages and immigration, Aboriginal people can look totally different from each other. The people of the Torres Strait do not look like the Aboriginal people of the mainland of Australia. Traditionally the people of the Torres Strait are Melonesian. The Torres Strait Island people also have had different influences in their culture. including the Malay and Japanese pearl divers in the early Pearl Diving Industry.

### **Q: You speak very good English- what nationality are you?**

**A:** In the 1967 Australian government referendum, Indigenous Australians were allowed to become citizens of their own country. Due to this it enabled us to such rights as EDUCATION.

### **Q: Are all Indigenous people called Koori's?**

**A:** No, in different states there are different names for the area. Interpretation, Integrity and Authenticity of a story is also promoted by correct use of words for identifying Indigenous peoples. Many Indigenous people use the following names to identify themselves depending on the area they come from.

#### **For Example:**

- Western Australia (southwest) - Nyoogar
- Northern NSW and Queensland (eastern) - Murri
- South Australia - Nungah
- Tasmania - Palawa
- Northern Territory (Arnhem land) - Yolngu
- NSW - Koori
- Victoria - Koorie

### **Q: How many Indigenous cultures are there in Australia?**

**A:** There are two Indigenous groups in Australia- The Australian Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders. Both groups have had similiar experiences, they both have their own unique culture, customs . Within these two major cultures, there are actually several hundred different cultures with their own customs and languages You may have heard of language groups like, Bardi from Broome, or Pitjantjatjara for South Australia, Meriam Mir spoken in the Eastern Torres Strait to name but a few.

### **Q: How many different Indigenous language groups are there in Australia?**

**A:** There are over 600 different Indigenous language groups in this country. Each tribe speaks their own language and there are over 600 dialects within each clan.

## Q: What is a corroboree?

**A:** A corroboree is a traditional dance that is done by both men and women. Its a social get together and can have a significant meaning, for example: trading, social issues and purely a form of celebration. In parts of the Northern Territory and the Central Desert they are sometimes called inmas.

## Q: What does the Aboriginal and the Torres Strait Islander Flag's represent, and what do their colours stand for?

### A: Torres Strait Island Flag

- Green is for the islands.
- Blue is for the water of the Torres Strait.
- Black represents the people of the Torres Strait.
- Durri is the head-dress that unites all the people.
- The star's five points represents the regions of the Torres Strait - eastern islands, northern islands, southern islands, western and central islands.



### Aboriginal Flag

- The black symbolises the Indigenous people.
- The yellow circle represents the sun - a constant giver and renewer of life.
- The red depicts the earth, also representing the ochre, which is used traditionally by Indigenous people in ceremonies.



"The flag was designed by Harold Thomas, a Luritija man from Central Australia who had been sent as a boy to St. Francis' Anglican boys home in Adelaide. In 1965 he won a scholarship to the SA School of Art. After his graduation in 1969 he worked as an artist for the the SA Museum and became involved in the Aboriginal rights movement".

The flag was first flown in Adelaide's Victoria Square in 1971. It was picked from among several others as the symbol of the Tent Embassy in Canberra the next year, and other Aboriginal groups subsequently adopted it. In 1987 the National Aborigines Day Observance Committee honoured Thomas with an award acknowledging his contribution. Although the flag has no official status under the fed Flags Act 1953 - 75, it is widely recognised as the symbol of the Aboriginal people.

Encyclopedia of Aboriginal Australia: published by Aboriginal Studies Press for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Studies 1994.

## Q: Why are there are no Aborigines left in Tasmania?

**A:** On the contrary, there is an Indigenous population there, both on the mainland of Tasmania, and on the Furneaux Islands just of the coast. In fact, these communities are a feature in one of our [Kam Yan](#) episodes.

## Q: How come you don't speak Aboriginal language?

**A:** A lot of Indigenous languages were made extinct during the first 200 years of occupation but there are Indigenous Australians who still speak various dialects throughout Australia.

For those who live in more urban environments, we have a kind of "lingo" that helps us distinguish one another. For example, if someone says "did you see the football on TV last night, it was deadly!" This means "... it was excellent!" There are other communities in Australia that use a non-verbal form of communication which, for those who are not familiar with it, can get very confused!

## The worst and shocking examples of stereotypical questions:

**Q: How come you dress differently to people who live in the outback?**

**A:** Well over the years we've taken on many aspects of European influence .. clothing being one of them!! But again, Aboriginality comes down to a sense of identity and pride in a culture which has survived thousands of years.

**Q: Is it true that we need to take a case of beer as a gesture?**

**A:** Not only is this question offensive but it represents the stereotyping that is perpetuated around Indigenous Culture. Also many communities and areas have very strict laws about alcohol and drugs. There are many **dry** communities.