



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

50 Years of NAIDOC: What we carry forward

Attributable to William Tilmouth, Co Chair of Children's Ground, recipient of the 2025 Human Rights Award and 2023 NAIDOC Male Elder of the Year

For fifty years, NAIDOC has celebrated the strength of our people. It honours the generations who protected our cultures, languages and law through every attempt to erase them. It carries forward the responsibility our old people accepted long before us: to ensure the next generation knows who they are, where they belong and the culture they inherit.

That responsibility is no less important today.

Across the country, we continue to see our cultures questioned, our history diminished and our rights treated as optional. Public attacks on First Nations people have become louder and more acceptable. Governments continue making decisions about our lives without recognising the authority of the people who have cared for this Country for thousands of years.

Last week, the Australian Government rejected key United Nations recommendations to strengthen the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility and implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). This week, communities across Australia will celebrate fifty years of NAIDOC.

That should give us pause.

For fifty years, NAIDOC has celebrated the strength of First Nations people, cultures and leadership. Yet recognition of our cultures too often stops where recognition of our rights and our authority begin. The distance between those two things remains one of the greatest challenges facing this country.

NAIDOC shouldn't be comfortable. It was created by our people to celebrate who we are, to tell the truth about our history and to keep our cultures strong. It belongs to First Nations people. It cannot become another national event where culture is applauded while the voices of our people are ignored.

Despite everything our people continue to face, our cultures remain strong because our old people never stopped carrying them. Our languages are still spoken. Our law continues to guide us. Our

children continue to learn from family, community and Country. Every generation accepts the responsibility to protect what was entrusted to them and pass it on.

That work continues every day at Children's Ground. Old people teach. Families lead. Children learn through language, culture and Country. Last week, for example, 100 First Nations Elders and educators from 36 Nations gathered on Arrernte Country through Utyerre Apanpe to strengthen First Nations education. They came together to draw on knowledge and leadership that has existed for thousands of years. Our people are not waiting for governments to recognise the value of our systems. We continue to build them because they are ours.

The next fifty years of NAIDOC must strengthen what the last fifty have fought to protect: our people, our cultures, our languages, our leadership and the right of our children to inherit them.

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