

I am an Australian whose forbears arrived in Australia in the 1840s and settled in Sydney and Tasmania. That is approx. 60 years after the first settlement. I am 83 years old and have seen over my life time how our Aboriginal people have been treated. I grew up in Armidale, NSW, and at that time they were treated as "escum". Many lived at the local tip in humpies. I will never forget an incident in my school, Armidale Demonstration School, when I was in 2nd class. My best friend was Aboriginal and we used to play together a lot. She was smart and good at school work. She lived in West Armidale. One day, to my amazement, our teacher told her she was "dirty". This was in front of all of us and I was shocked. From then on, I never saw again. She never came to school and I lost a lovely friend. I still remember her name and have tried to look her up in subsequent years.

As a mature age student, I attended Macquarie University in my forties and secured a degree in Linguistics. I received an Honours degree and my thesis was on "Aspect in Aboriginal Languages". Through my study I discovered how complex and amazing the Aboriginal culture was and is and what different perspectives of reality their languages reflect. I am so glad to hear that nowadays, Aboriginal languages are being taught in some schools and that the maintenance of their culture and language is starting to be given importance.

So I heartily support the initiative to allow the Aboriginal flag to become our national flag alongside the current Australian flag. I have tried on several occasions to buy an Aboriginal flag in order to place it in a place of prominence in my home but have not been able to find any in the shops except during Naidoc week. I have also been supporting the move to have the Aboriginal flag flown on the Sydney Harbour Bridge throughout the year and not just during Naidoc Week.

In our western way of thinking and believing, we have so much to learn from our Aboriginal forbears. I will continue to do whatever I can to promote our understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal culture and having the flag freely available is a great token of our willingness to open ourselves up to this amazing heritage.

I am so aware of how we displaced the original inhabitants of this land and how we took over and squashed the knowledge, heritage and spiritual awareness that they had built up for millennia. Can we now not come to a place of acknowledging their prior ownership of the land on which we live and breathe and have our being.

May the Senate Committee find ways for us to display the flag freely with pride in our first people.

Louise Robinson