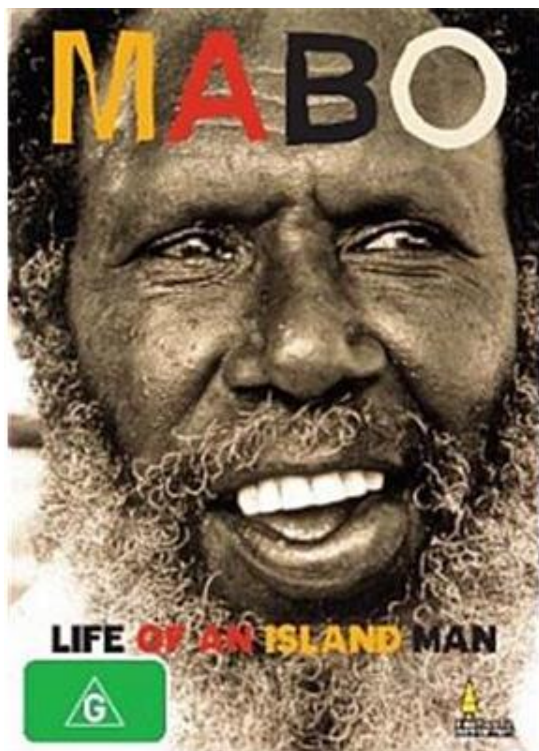


Mabo Day



Mabo Day occurs annually on 3 June.

The day commemorates Eddie Koiki Mabo (1936–1992) a Torres Strait Islander whose campaign for Indigenous land rights led to a landmark decision of the High Court of Australia that on 3 June 1992, overturned the legal fiction of *terra nullius* which had characterised Australian law with regards to land and title since the voyage of James Cook in 1770.

The Mabo decision was a legal case held in 1992. It is short for *Mabo and others v Queensland (No 2) (1992)*. The legal decision was made by the High Court on 3 June 1992. The High Court is the highest court in Australia's judicial system. The Mabo decision was named after **Eddie Mabo**, the man who challenged the Australian legal system and fought for recognition of the rights of

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional owners of their land.



In 2010 a [campaign](#) was launched to make Mabo Day a national holiday. It has been suggested that Mabo Day is more significant to Australians than the late Queen's Birthday. In 2002, on the tenth anniversary of the High Court decision, Mabo's widow, Bonita Mabo, called for a national public holiday on 3 June. On the eleventh anniversary, in 2003, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) launched a petition to make 3 June an Australian Public Holiday. Eddie Mabo Jnr, for the Mabo family, said:

"We believe that a public holiday would be fitting to honour and recognise the contribution to the High Court decision of not only my father and his co-plaintiffs, James Rice, Father Dave Passi, Sam Passi and Celuia Salee, but also to acknowledge all Indigenous Australians who have empowered and inspired each other.

To date we have not had a public holiday that acknowledges Indigenous people, and which recognises our contribution, achievements and survival in Australia.

A public holiday would be a celebration all Australians can share in with pride ... Mabo symbolises truth and justice and is a cornerstone of Reconciliation."

Watch the [BTN](#) report about the life of Eddie Mabo and why he is such a significant Australian.

What do you know about the Mabo case? Watch this short ABC video [Counted: Gail](#)

[Mabo and Native Title](#) and meet Gail Mabo, the daughter of famous land rights campaigner, Eddie Mabo.

MABO: Life of an Island Man traces the story of the life of the extraordinary man, Eddie Koiki Mabo. His struggle for land rights, and his remarkable life in general, have had a profound effect on Indigenous rights in Australia. The film is a celebration of his achievements. It highlights how Mabo pursued the case to have his ownership of property on Mer (Murray Island) legally recognised, and how that claim grew into a case that changed indigenous rights in Australia. [Study notes are available](#). The film **Mabo: Life of an Island Man**, can be seen on [SBS On Demand](#) or purchased on DVD

With students listen to the **ABC National podcast [Don't Fence Me In: 25 Years Since Mabo](#)** - a deeply personal account about Edie Mabo presented by family spokesperson Gail Mabo and filmmaker Trevor Graham, as they remember what life was like while the court case consumed their lives - full of stories we've not heard before about Eddie Koiki Mabo.

In 2010 a [campaign](#) was launched to make Mabo Day a national holiday in Australia. With your students develop a proposal for making Mabo Day a national public holiday and consider sending it to your local member.

Explore the excellent [Mabo - The Native Title Revolution](#) website and learning resources. **Mabo - The Native Title Revolution** delves into the Mabo legal case and the important issues it raises for Australians and indigenous peoples everywhere. It gives an overview of the case and provides an insight into both the man at its centre, Eddie "Koiki" Mabo, and Torres Strait Islander culture. Broader concepts such as colonisation, land rights and native title are explored through hundreds of specially created mini movies, animations, archival film clips and a wealth of stills and stories from primary and secondary sources.

Also featured on the site is a 37-minute online version of the film *Land Bilong Islanders* by

award winning director Trevor Graham. Discuss the importance of Native Title with your students.

Significant in Victoria is the rejection of the **Yorta Yorta Native Title case** in 1998 in the High Court - a decision upheld again in 2002. In April 2004, the Bracks government announced a cooperative agreement with the Yorta Yorta people that included recognition of public land, rivers and lakes throughout north-central Victoria.

With senior secondary students discuss: To what extent does the concept of justice correlate with courts upholding laws; and to what extent is the law adequate in addressing issues of justice, under current Native Title legislation?

Background information about the landmark Yorta Yorta case can be found on the SLV site [here](#). More comprehensive information about the Yorta Yorta Struggle for Land Justice can be found on the [On Country Learning Course](#) Wordpress site.



Mabo Day Celebrations in Townsville, QLD 2011 see: <http://www.abc.net.au/local/videos/2011/06/03/3235188.htm>



Image source: <https://waynera.wordpress.com/yorta-yorta-struggle-for-land-justice/>

Victorian Curriculum:

VCHHK076 Significance of days and weeks celebrated or commemorated in Australia and the importance of symbols and emblems, including Australia Day, ANZAC Day, Harmony Week, National Reconciliation Week, NAIDOC week and National Sorry Day: *History 3- 4*

VCHHK154 Significance of the following events in changing society: 1962 right to vote federally, 1967 Referendum, Reconciliation, Mabo decision, Bringing Them Home Report (the Stolen Generations), the Apology and the different perspectives of these events: *History 9-10*

VCCCL023 Compare how laws are made in Australia, including through parliaments (statutory law) and courts (common law), and explain different types of laws, including executive law (delegated law), criminal law, civil law and the place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customary law; *Civics and Citizenship 7-8*

VCHHK155 Effects of methods used by civil rights activists to achieve change for **Aboriginal** and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and the role of one individual or group in the struggle: *History 9-10*



Produced by the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI), June 2018, updated June 2024.

We are always seeking to improve our education resources, to make them useful, relevant and highly readable. We invite you to email through suggestions including how you as educators incorporate Aboriginal perspectives, especially Victorian ones in your teaching and curriculum.

Any enquiries, feedback and suggestions are welcomed, by contacting VAEAI on (03) 94810800 or emailing vaso@vaeai.org.au.

For more Victorian Aboriginal Perspectives in education, see our *Koorie Perspectives in Curriculum Bulletins* available on the **VAEAI website**, and the annual VAEAI **Koorie Education Calendar**.