3.9 The Apology

HREROC's Bringing Them Home report encouraged Australia's state and territory parliaments to vote in support of a motion of apology (see table below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Apology proposed by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27 May 1997</td>
<td>Western Australian Legislative Assembly</td>
<td>Leader of the Opposition, Geoff Gallop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 May 1997</td>
<td>South Australian House of Assembly</td>
<td>Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Dean Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 June 1997</td>
<td>Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly</td>
<td>Chief Minister Kate Carroll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 June 1997</td>
<td>New South Wales Legislative Assembly</td>
<td>Premier Bob Carr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 August 1997</td>
<td>Tasmanian House of Assembly</td>
<td>Premier Tony Burke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 September 1997</td>
<td>Victorian Legislative Assembly</td>
<td>Premier Jeff Kennett</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 May 1999</td>
<td>Queensland Legislative Assembly</td>
<td>Premier Peter Beattie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 October 2001</td>
<td>Northern Territory Legislative Assembly</td>
<td>Chief Minister Clare Martin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

John Howard, the prime minister of the time, rejected the idea of making a formal apology saying that Australians of this generation should not be required to accept guilt and blame for past actions and policies over which they had no control. He argued that practical measures of compensation — what he called practical reconciliation — were a more meaningful means of addressing this 'most blemished chapter' in Australia’s history. Over the next decade he continued in his refusal to make an apology in federal parliament.

Ordinary Australians expressed their feelings by signing 'Sorry' books, recording their apologies electronically on a specially designated website and on 26 May 1998 participating in activities for the first National Sorry Day. Since then, 26 May has become the day when people acknowledge the hardships and injustices that the Stolen Generations experienced and seek to embark with them on a process of healing.

On 28 May 2000, over 250,000 people visibly showed their support for Indigenous Australians by joining in the Corroboree 2000 walk across Sydney Harbour Bridge.

The event served to underline the disappointment many people felt over the federal government's failure to apologise to the Stolen Generations.

**The apology, 13 February 2008**

Labor Party leader Kevin Rudd became Prime Minister of Australia on 3 December 2007. At 9 am on 13 February 2008, the second sitting day of the new parliament, he delivered an apology to the Stolen Generations. Seventeen representatives of the Stolen Generations and four former prime ministers sat listening to this within parliament.

Media outlets broadcast the apology live on television throughout Australia and on large outdoor screens at places such as Parliament House in Canberra, Martin Place in Sydney, Federation Square in Melbourne and the foreshore of the Swan River in Perth.

In March 2008, the Commonwealth Government announced its commitment to closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians with regard to health, life expectancy, levels of education and employment opportunities. This policy, along with the Apology, seemed to promise a turning point in the Commonwealth Government's relationship with Indigenous Australians.

I move:

That today we honour the Indigenous peoples of this land, the oldest continuing cultures in human history.

We reflect on their past mistreatment.

We reflect in particular on the mistreatment of those who were Stolen Generations — this blemished chapter in our nation’s history.

The time has now come for the nation to turn a new page in Australia’s history by righting the wrongs of the past and moving forward with confidence to the future.

We apologise for the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on those our fellow Australians. We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country.

For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry.

To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry.

And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say sorry.

We the Parliament of Australia respectfully request that this apology be received in the spirit in which it is offered as part of the healing of the nation.

For the future we take heart; resolving that this new page in the history of our great continent can now be written.

We today take this first step by acknowledging the past and laying claim to a future that embraces all Australians.

A future where this Parliament resolves that the injustices of the past must never, never happen again.

A future where we harness the determination of all Australians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to close the gap that lies between us in life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity.

A future where we embrace the possibility of new solutions to enduring problems where old approaches have failed.

A future based on mutual respect, mutual resolve and mutual responsibility.

A future where all Australians, whatever their origins, are truly equal partners, with equal opportunities and with an equal stake in shaping the next chapter in the history of this great country, Australia.