

## How does the National Museum of Australia represent the 1967 Referendum? Site Study

For the 40th anniversary of the Referendum the National Museum of Australia set up a small display, entitled *'67 Referendum Spin, myths and meanings*.

- 1 From your study of the 1967 Referendum in this unit what would you say were the:
- spin
  - myth
  - meanings
- of the Referendum?

Below is a photograph of the National Museum of Australia display.

Any display is a representation of history — that is, it is somebody's version of what happened, and is created as a result of what they choose to include, and what they choose to exclude. Your task is to analyse this representation of the 1967 Referendum and make your own judgement about it. You will find enlargements of the numbered elements in the following pages.



Photograph George Serras

Use this set of questions to help you make your assessment of the site.

### KEY CRITERIA for judging a museum display

- What does the display show?
- Is the historical context explained clearly?
- Is the significance of this display clearly explained?
- Are the objects displayed authentic for that event or period?
- Are these objects the best possible ones to be displayed?
- Are the text descriptions clear and informative?
- Do the surroundings influence my impression of the display?
- How is the display arranged?
- Is there a particular message being conveyed?
- Is the nature of the event clearly identified (e.g. am I told if it is controversial or contested)?
- If so, is a variety of viewpoints clearly and fairly put?
- Do I know where the evidence has come from and what sort of evidence it is?
- Is it giving me a particular message?
- Is its purpose to present objects (neutral), or to explain (impartial), or to argue a particular view (partisan)?
- At the end, do I feel that I really understand the situation?

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# 1967 Referendum: The facts

## Celebrating the 40th anniversary of the 1967 Referendum

In 1967, after 10 years of dedicated campaigning, a referendum was held to change the Australian Constitution. The changes gave the government the power to legislate for Aboriginal people as a group and to allow them to be counted in the census. These changes were seen by many as a recognition of Aboriginal people's rights as full citizens. This year marks the 40th anniversary of the 1967 Referendum.



Victory celebration, Swaley College June 1967  
Members of the New South Wales First 'Yes' committee near their campaign director, Pat Handley (center), after the success of the 1967 Referendum.

## Campaigning for change



Referendum campaign pamphlet 1967  
National Library of Australia

While the Australian Government supported the proposed change, the 'Yes' campaign was run by a key national lobby group, the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. A remarkable mix of people — unionists, conservatives, Christians, communists, rich and poor, black and white — all worked together for change.



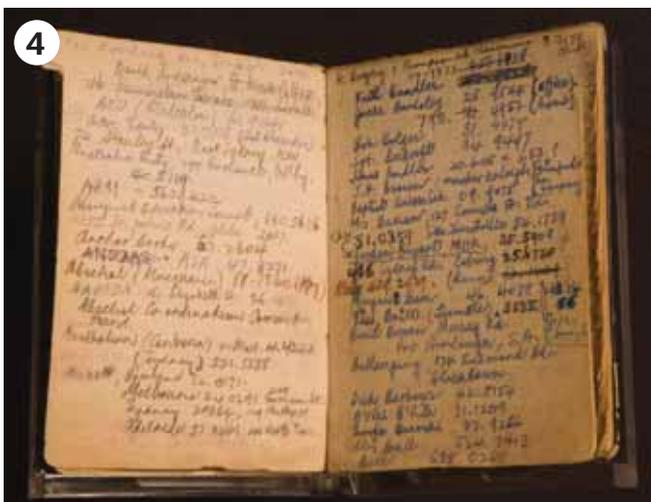
Australian Electoral Commission  
Photograph George Serras

**Voting booth** about 1960s (3)

**Voting box** about 1960s (2)

Looking at the voting booth and voting box used in the 1967 Referendum, it is interesting to consider what the referendum meant to many people. Some thought the referendum gave Aboriginal people the right to vote, but legislation passed in 1962 provided all Aboriginal adults with voting rights for Commonwealth elections.

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## Calling all activists

This 1967 address book belongs to activist Jack Horner. It lists some of the many people and organizations that supported the 'Yes' campaign.

**Address book** 1967

On loan from Jack Horner  
**Collaborating for Indigenous Rights**  
<http://www.nma.gov.au/indigenousrights/>  
Photograph George Serras

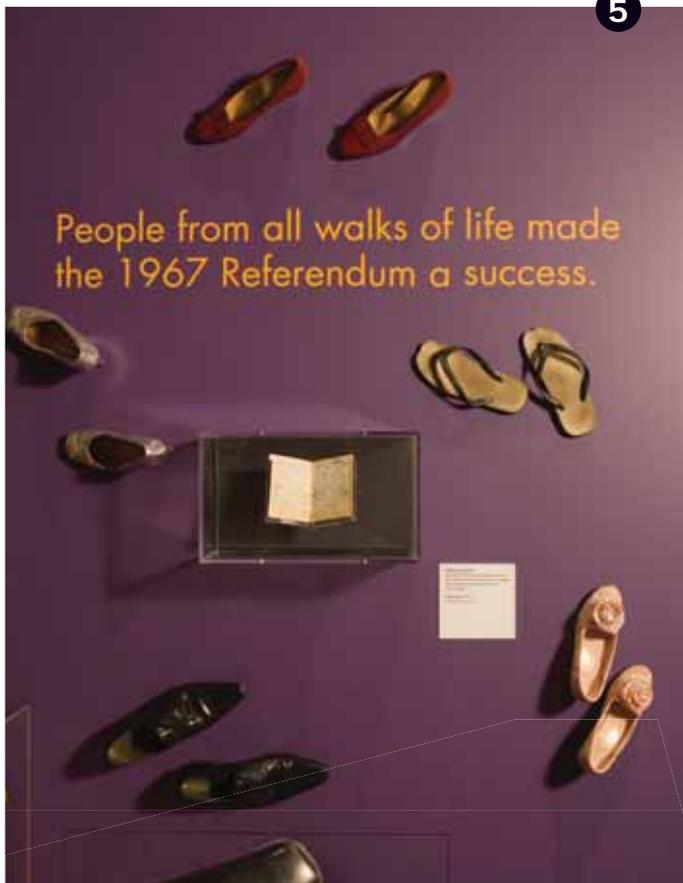


### Whose shoes?

These 1960s shoes are a reminder of the diversity of people who took part in the 'Yes' campaign. People from churches, unions, universities, small businesses, political parties and the general community all dedicated their time. Who do you think might have worn the silver evening shoes or the thongs?

Unlike the other objects in this exhibit it is fine to touch the shoes in front of you.

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Shoes about 1960s



National Museum of Australia  
Photographs George Serras

## Myth buster

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Confusion about what the 1967 Referendum did and did not achieve for Aboriginal people is common. Here we answer some misconceptions.

- The vote?** No. Aboriginal adults already had the right to vote in federal elections.
- Citizenship?** No. Aboriginal people were already Australian citizens.
- Counted in the census?** Yes and no. Aboriginal people had been counted in the census, but the figures were subtracted from the total.



Census collection, Ernabella Mission, 31 June 1966  
photograph by Peter Donnelly

### So what did the referendum achieve?

With an overwhelming 91 per cent of voters choosing 'Yes', the referendum gave future governments a mandate to implement change in Aboriginal affairs.

But Aboriginal people have had mixed responses to the referendum.



Racial discrimination, what's that? 23 May 1967  
The campaign for the 1967 Referendum was widely covered in the media. Two days before the referendum, the Sydney Morning Herald included this original photograph on its front cover.  
photograph by George Carter, Publications

*For most Aborigines [the referendum] is basically and most importantly a matter of seeing white Australians finally, after 179 years, affirming at last that they believe we are human beings.*

Charles Dixon, 1967

*If the referendum hadn't been passed, we would have been further advanced, because white Australia would not have fooled the world into thinking that something positive was being done.*

Karen Gibson, 1992

*At the time I definitely thought that the referendum achieved something — personally, it made me lose my inferiority complex.*

Richard Scrimshaw, 1997

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# '67 Referendum Spin, myths and meanings

People from all walks of life made the 1967 Referendum a success.

### Myth buster

It is a common myth that the 1967 Referendum was a narrow victory. In fact, it was a decisive success, with 70% of voters supporting the 'Yes' campaign.



By 1967, the 'Yes' campaign had become a national movement, with people from all walks of life joining the cause.



### 1967 Referendum: The facts

The 1967 Referendum was a landmark event in New Zealand's history, marking the end of the country's status as a British colony and the beginning of its journey towards full independence.



The 'Yes' campaign was led by a coalition of diverse groups, including the Labour Party, the National Party, and various community organizations.



# 1967 Referendum: The facts

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Victory celebration, Trarby College June 1967  
Members of the New South Wales Vote 'Yes' committee toast their campaign director, Faith Bandler (centre), after the success of the 1967 Referendum.  
AAT/95

## Campaigning for change



Referendum campaign pamphlet 1967  
National Library of Australia

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125 - Koorlong Ave, Trumperie 3498.  
 David Anderson, St. Mark College  
~~46 Pennington Terrace, Wth. Adelaide~~  
 ACU (Malcolm) 61.9441  
 Actors Equity 31.7718 (H.A. Alexander)  
 72 Stanley St., East Sydney, NSW.  
 Australian Party, 299 Pinehurst St, W. Ry.  
 40.5119.  
 ABM - 5609.422  
 Aboriginal Education Council, 660.5696  
 132 St. John's Rd, Glebe, 2037.  
 Anchor Books 61.2604  
~~ANZAS~~ - ASA 47.3271.  
 Abschal (Macquarie) 88.7360 (Hwy)  
 AAESDA - 761 Elizabeth St. 26.14  
 Abschal Co-ordination Committee  
 Fund.  
 Australian (Canberra) 4-Mort. H. 42  
 (Sydney) 221.5588  
 Bantam 32.8171.  
 Melbourne 34.0291 <sup>4189</sup> ~~Strawson St.~~  
 Sydney 20364, 129 Phillip St  
 Adelaide 51.0461. 140 North T.

R. Beagley 1 Thompson Rd. Claremont 3.3175  
 144.1873 ~~457.6028~~ (Bath)  
 Faith Bandler 28.4544 (office)  
 Grace Bardsley 798. #. 4952 (home)  
 Bob Bolger 31.4074  
 Sgt. Beckroft 34.9497  
 Hans Bandler 20.648 x 653?  
 J.H. Brown (member Raleigh) 09.9075  
 Baptist Union Sec. 09.9075 (Vimpey)  
 Mrs Barron, 127 Connells St. Rd.  
 5th. Hurstville 54.1759  
 CAN 81.0359  
 Gordon Bryant MHR, 35.5908  
 486 Sydney Rd. Coburg 25.6720  
 Melle 459.2939. (Home) 43.1109  
 Margaret Ban 46.4078 43.11  
 Tiso, Brill (Lismore), 3555. 86  
 Basil Brown Murray Rd.  
 Port Noorlunga, S.A.  
 Ballanquay 174 Richmond Rd.  
 Blacktown.  
 Dick Barbour 42.5154  
 B'Nai B'Rith 31.1209  
 Sonja Barvski 37.9266  
 Mrs Ball 524.7413  
 Bell 638.0281



People from all walks of life made  
the 1967 Referendum a success.



**Setting of events**  
The 1967 Referendum was held on 11 December 1967, and was the first time that the people of New Zealand voted on a referendum. The referendum was held at the same time as the 1967 general election.



# Myth buster

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**Citizenship?** No. Aboriginal people were already Australian citizens.

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Census collection, Ernabella Mission 30 June 1966  
photograph by Winifred Howard

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But Aboriginal people have had mixed responses to the referendum.



Racial discrimination, what's that? 23 May 1967  
The campaign for the 1967 Referendum was widely covered in the media. Two days before the referendum, the *Sydney Morning Herald* included this staged photograph on its front cover.  
photograph by George Lynam, Paraphotone

*For most Aborigines [the referendum] is basically and most importantly a matter of seeing white Australians finally, after 179 years, affirming at last that they believe we are human beings.*

Chicks Dixon, 1997

*If the referendum hadn't been passed, we would have been further advanced, because white Australia would not have fooled the world into thinking that something positive was being done.*

Kevin Gilbert, 1992

*At the time I definitely thought that the referendum achieved something — personally, it made me lose my inferiority complex.*

Burtum Burtum, 1997



# Collaborating for Indigenous Rights

Home The Referendum People Organisations Timeline Annex

- Earlier attempts to change the Constitution
- Australia in the 1950s
- Early petitions
- National petition campaign, 1962-65
- Parliament's and Cabinet's actions, 1966-68
- PM/ALP's Legislative Reform Committee
- Cabinet Decision, 1967
- Campaigning for a YES vote
- History
- References

## The Referendum, 1957-67



In 1967, after ten years of campaigning, a referendum was held to change the Australian Constitution. Two negative references to Aboriginal Australians were removed, giving the recognition of Aboriginal people as full Australian citizens.

The 1967 Referendum is just part of the story of activists, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, working to improve the lives of Indigenous people. There were always Indigenous people who fought against discrimination and the loss of their land, but in the 1950s they were joined by non-Indigenous people who wanted to join the campaign. Collaboration for Justice was a feature of the 1950s, 60s and 70s.

Next: Earlier attempts to change the Constitution