

***This release contains the names of Meriam people who have passed**

Media Release Mabo Day 2022

Today marks the 30th anniversary of the day the High Court of Australia handed down the *Mabo* decision. NAATSIHWP recognises the leadership of Eddie Koiki Mabo, Reverend David Passi, Sam Passi, James Rice and Celuia Mapo Salee in their court battle against the Queensland government to claim land rights over the Murray Islands, and the work of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people who have advocated for land since colonisation. Mabo Day is a public holiday in the Torres Strait, and a day of celebration for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people everywhere.

The *Mabo v Queensland (No. 2)* case was significant as it overturned the legal fiction of 'terra nullius', the misconception that the Australian continent was unoccupied prior to European settlement. In doing so, the Australian legal system acknowledged that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people are the original residents of the continent. This has had major implications on the foundations of Australia's story.

Connection to Country is a key social and cultural determinant of health for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. Recognition of this unique connection in Western legal systems goes some way to ensuring that that mob can live on country and maintain cultural practices. Protecting this connection will result in positive health outcomes.

Additionally, we know that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people have occupied this land and provided health care to community for 65,000 years. As the world's only culturally based health professions underpinned by national training and regulation, the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Health Practitioner and Health Worker workforces are part of a tradition of care that stretches for millennia.

The struggle for land rights is ongoing. The passing of the *Native Title Act 1993* and proceeding cases simultaneously codified the impact of the *Mabo* decision, and limited its effectiveness. This means that a grant of Native Title is not the same as full 'ownership' of the land. Many of our members, their families and patients are likely to have been involved in Native Title claims over the past years, and will know how difficult the process of making a Native Title claim can be.

Today, we urge Australians to celebrate the achievement of Eddie Koiki Mabo and his colleagues, and consider what more needs to be done to facilitate truth telling and recognise sovereignty.