

First Nations



CONSULTATION REPORT 2025

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Exhibition
Community Consultation

Community Sentiment Study

By Courtney Marsh
Manager, Strategic Projects, First Nations

Laura McBride
Director, First Nations

The Australian Museum (AM) acknowledges that it operates across the unceded lands, waters, and skies of many First Peoples. These lands have been cared for and protected since the beginning of time. We share the responsibility of advocating for Country in ways that honour the sovereignty of the First Nations peoples of this land.

As the first museum in Australia, established in 1827, the AM is part of Australia’s colonial history. We acknowledge the impact of historical beliefs and attitudes towards First Nations peoples and the collecting of their cultural belongings.

In more recent years, the AM has become a strong advocate for First Nations peoples and cultures through the principle of self-determination. This report places First Nations peoples at the centre of decision-making about its First Nations collections and exhibitions.

A note on terminology: This Report uses the terms “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander”, “Indigenous”, and “First Nations” interchangeably. The First Nations Consultation Team acknowledges that these terms are used in a variety of contexts. In this Report, these terms refer primarily to peoples, Nations, and cultures in Australia, unless indicated otherwise.

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Overview

In the coming years, the Australian Museum (**AM; Museum**) will open a new permanent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander exhibition (**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Exhibition; the Exhibition**). With the AM approaching its 200th anniversary year in 2027, this is an exciting period to reflect upon the AM's relationship with First Nations peoples and celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

The current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander exhibition in the First Nations Gallery within the historic Vernon Wing of the Australian Museum has reached the end of its lifespan. This gallery was previously updated into two First Nations exhibitions during the 2010s (*Garrigarrang: Sea Country*, 2014 – present; and *Bayala Nura: Yarning Country*, 2015 – 2023), which were preceded by the *Indigenous Australians: Australia’s First Peoples* exhibition from 1996 – 2015. Before then, there were several iterations of an Australian Ethnology or Aboriginal gallery exhibited at the Museum across past decades.¹

To help inform the social, historical, and cultural content of a new First Nations permanent exhibition, two wide-scale surveys took place across 2023 and 2024 to provide relevant contemporary data to the curatorial team. This **Consultation Report 2025** (also **Report**) summarises the findings of:

1. The Australian Museum’s **2023–2024 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Consultation Survey**, conducted by the AM's First Nations Consultation Team; and
2. The AM’s **2023 Community Sentiment Study**, conducted by market research company Fiftyfive5, commissioned by the Australian Museum.

Acknowledgments

The First Nations Consultation Team would like to thank:

- All of the First Nations peoples and communities who contributed their knowledge and feedback;
- *Unsettled* curatorial team Laura McBride (Director, First Nations) and Dr Mariko Smith (Head of First Nations Collections & Research) for their advice and assistance with preparing this Report;
- AM colleagues for their support, assistance in consultation, and preparing material to present in this Report;
- Fiftyfive5 team: Israel Stephens, Sarah Ashby, Ariane Wright, and Aimee Griffin; and
- First Nations workshop and consultation facilitators Fleur Magick Dennis, Locky Magick Dennis, Amanda Jane Reynolds, Jane Yettica, Deslyn Marsh, and Rachael Cavanagh.

We would like to acknowledge and pay our respects to the Old People – the Ancestors and Elders past and present – who guide us in their wisdom through Country, culture, and community.

¹ Australian Museum (updated 09/01/2024), *Exhibitions Timeline*, australian.museum/about/history/timelines/exhibitions-timeline/

First Nations Consultation Team



Courtney Marsh
Minyungbal, South Sea Islander | Manager, Strategic Projects, First Nations Division

Courtney (she/her) is a proud Minyungbal and South Sea Islander woman. Courtney has experience in curation, consultation, and community co-design across a range of First Nations exhibitions, projects, and programming. Her passion is the amplification and self-representation of First Nations voices, especially in spaces where they have historically been ignored, misrepresented, or exploited. Through authentic engagement, co-creation, and commitment to shared-benefit projects, Courtney

believes that the AM can be a place in which the knowledges, objects, and cultures of First Nations peoples can be celebrated. As the First Nations curatorial lead for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Exhibition, Courtney will contribute her culturally-informed insight. Courtney has a Bachelor of Arts (University of Sydney) majoring in Archaeology and Ancient History and a Master of Museum and Heritage Studies (University of Sydney) .



Kiah Walford
Palawa | Repatriation Researcher, First Nations Division

Kiah (she/her) is a proud Aboriginal woman of Palawa descent. She has extensive experience in child protection social work, in addition to working in the museum sector across First Nations programming, archival collections, research, and curation. She is a staunch advocate for her people,

in the sharing of culture and knowledge. Kiah has a Bachelor of Social Work (Honours)/ Arts (UNSW) majoring in Indigenous Studies. She is currently completing a Master of Information Studies (Charles Sturt University).



Remi Ferguson
Euahlayi, Wiradjuri | Cultural Collection Officer, First Nations Division

Remi (she/they) has worked at the AM across First Nations programming, exhibition development, tour guiding, and collections. In her role in the First Nations Consultation team, she assisted in distributing the 2023–2024 Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander Community Consultation Survey and compilation of data. Remi has a Bachelor of Arts (UNSW) majoring in Theatre and Performance studies and minoring in History.

Editorial Support



Dr Mariko Smith
Yuin, Japanese | Head of First Nations Collections & Research, First Nations Division

Dr Mariko Smith (she/her) is a Yuin woman with Japanese heritage. Mariko focuses on Indigenous community-based cultural resurgence initiatives and incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing into curatorial and creative practices. Mariko’s academic and professional qualifications include a combined Bachelor degree in Arts and Laws (University of Sydney), Graduate Diploma of Legal Practice (College of Law), Master of Museum Studies

(awarded with Merit: University of Sydney), and Doctor of Philosophy from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Sydney. Her PhD thesis focused on the cultural resurgence of Aboriginal tied-bark canoe making in south-eastern Aboriginal communities, with the topic inspired by a museum’s conference event and community outreach programming. She is also an Honorary Associate in the School of Art, Communication and English at the University of Sydney.

Introduction

This project is an exciting opportunity for the AM to build upon its success in First Nations operations to deliver and curate a best practice permanent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander exhibition that can be an empowering, self-determining cultural space with long-term appeal and relevance to the NSW Public and other visitors.

Since the previous development of the *Garrigarrang: Sea Country* and *Bayala Nura: Yarning Country* exhibitions in the First Nations Gallery space, AM First Nations staff members have produced several ground-breaking projects which set the industry standard on First Nations-led, community-centred, and culturally-informed curatorial practice: *GADI* (2018); *The 2020 Project: First Nations Community Consultation Report* (2019); *MAHN* (2019); *Unsettled* (2021); *Burra* learning space (2022); *Sharks* (2022 – First Nations cultural content); *Barka: The Forgotten River* (2023); and *Her Name is Nanny Nellie* (2023).

Many of these projects have been recognised by the museum sector both nationally and internationally for their best practice in cultural interpretation, leadership in Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) protocols and engagement with First Nations communities.

Director & CEO's Statement



Kim McKay AO, Director & CEO, Australian Museum

I am proud to share the 2025 Consultation Report findings that will assist the Australian Museum with redeveloping the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander permanent exhibition. This is a highly significant project for this institution in anticipation of our 200th anniversary in 2027. As the first museum and the second oldest scientific research organisation in Australia, the AM upholds a great responsibility to the public we serve as a trusted source of knowledge and information on nature and cultures from across the Australia-Pacific region and beyond. There continues to be a need to critically consider the AM’s ongoing role and impact in contemporary Australian society.

In 2020, we prominently placed a Statement of Reflection in Hintze Hall, recognising that the Museum is part of Australia’s colonial history and we acknowledge the wrongs done to the First Nations Peoples. In recent years, we have welcomed over one million visitors annually and received great acclaim for the First Nations and Pasifika exhibitions and programs, including the multiple award-winning *Unsettled* exhibition which continues to set the standard internationally and nationally for robust First Nations-led truth-telling curation. This 2025 Consultation Report presents results from not only a First Nations community survey but also a broader Australian public community sentiment survey. This is highly relevant for museums as sites of social activity and engagement. I sincerely thank all the respondents from the two datasets for giving the Australian Museum their feedback and insight.

Trustee and Director's Statements



Distinguished Professor Larissa Behrendt AO, Australian Museum Trustee

The Australian Museum’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander permanent exhibition redevelopment will build upon the inspiring precedent already set by the Museum in recent years for its culturally strong truth-telling work led by Wailwan woman and inaugural Director, First Nations Laura McBride with the support of the Director & CEO, Executive Leadership Team, and Board of Trustees. The AM has recently endorsed and launched its 2024–2027 Corporate Strategic Plan, which includes its commitment to amplifying and prioritising First Nations and Pasifika peoples, cultures, and collections. The Museum’s mission is to ignite wonder, inspire debate, and drive change – this is especially relevant in its groundbreaking work in challenging the historical relationships between First Nations peoples and collecting institutions. This often included disproportionate power dynamics and involved culturally insensitive practices. The Museum privileges the perspectives and views of First Nations peoples in ways that redefine how museums engage with its visiting public and share the rich diversity of Indigenous cultures. By the addition of an Australian public community sentiment survey, it is also being responsive to the existing views and perceptions held by ordinary Australians about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, which are often based on outdated ideas and negative stereotyping. Unfortunately, these sentiments can be highly influential and have negative social impact for First Nations peoples. The Australian Museum as an important institution in society is well-placed to address this issue.



Laura McBride, Director, First Nations, Australian Museum

The Australian Museum holds significant cultural and archaeological objects alongside the largest natural science collection in Australia. This entrusts the Museum with special custodial responsibility to not only physically preserve and maintain the collections but a duty to ensure engagement and interpretation is undertaken appropriately with the right stakeholders. Museum consultation methods have been evolving over the years regarding cultural content exhibition development. With the policy shifts from the object to the subject, the material to the relational, cultural institutions which hold First Nations collections are expected to create content which engages with the needs and interests of First Nations communities as well as finding ways for that content to also resonate with the broader visiting public. By extending our reach to gathering Australian community sentiments from predominantly non-Indigenous peoples, we are adding more depth to our analysis and research which will benefit our production of high-quality and meaningful content. In undertaking this process, we can be socially responsible in acknowledging the historical role the Museum has played in contributing to false or simplified perceptions about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and start a process of redress by addressing such perceptions that remain within Australian society.

Supporters and Advisors

The following First Nations community members are respected in our communities as specialists, advocates, and knowledge-holders. They have each reviewed the 2025 Consultation Report and respectively endorse the approach and delivery of the consultation for the new Exhibition. Throughout the duration of this project, the First Nations Curatorial Team will continue to seek, receive, and implement the guidance and advice of First Nations Elders and community members to ensure that the exhibition space and associated programming reflects Cultural Lores and represents our communities appropriately and accurately.



Rowena Welsh
Dharawal, Gumbaynggirr

Rowena is a Dharawal and Gumbaynggirr woman, and a proud member of the Redfern and La Perouse communities with cultural connections to multiple coastal Sydney clan groups. As a culture and heritage practitioner, she embeds Aboriginal knowledge, stories, truth-telling, and history into built environment projects. Rowena is a member of the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Advisory Council, nominated by the Heritage Council of NSW.



Badger Bates
Barkandji

Badger Bates is a respected First Nations Elder, artist, cultural leader, and fierce advocate for Indigenous rights. Known for his activism in fighting for water rights, he has dedicated his life to preserving cultural heritage, empowering youth, and advocating for environmental justice through art, storytelling, and community engagement.



Lorena Allam
Gamilaraay, Yuwaalaraay

Lorena Allam is a multiple Walkley award winning journalist. After a 30 year career as journalist and broadcaster at the ABC working for News, Triple J, Radio National, TV and online, she joined *The Guardian* in 2018 as its first Indigenous Affairs editor. In forays outside journalism she worked on the landmark Bringing them Home inquiry, and helmed the Indigenous collection at the National Film and Sound Archive.



Bronwyn Penrith
Wiradjuri, Yuin

Bronwyn Penrith is a respected Wiradjuri and Yuin Elder with over 40 years of community leadership and activism. Based in Redfern, she has been a tireless advocate for Aboriginal rights, cultural preservation, and the safety of Indigenous women. As Chairperson of Mudgin-Gal Aboriginal Women’s Centre, she supports women and children facing family violence. Aunty Bronwyn also serves on the City of Sydney’s Aboriginal Advisory Panel and is a qualified Family Dispute Resolution Practitioner.



Nathan mudyi Sentance
Wiradjuri

Nathan mudyi Sentance is a Wiradjuri librarian and writer who grew up on Darkinjung Country. He is Head of Collections, First Nations at the Powerhouse and is a member of the Indigenous Archives Collective. His writing has appeared in *The Guardian*, *History Australia*, *British Art Studies*, and on *The Archival Decolonist*.



Professor Robynne Quiggin AO
Wiradjuri

Professor Robynne Quiggin AO is a member of the Wiradyuri nation. She has lived and worked in Sydney, practicing as a solicitor and consultant focusing on legal, compliance and policy issues, relevant to Indigenous Peoples including human rights, the arts and heritage, financial inclusion, consumer issues, sustainable investment and governance.



Luke Pearson
Gamilaroi

Luke Pearson is a Gamilaroi man and the founder and CEO of IndigenousX. Luke works primarily in Indigenous media, and also provides anti-racism training and resources across Australia. He is a respected writer, public speaker and advocate for anti-racism and Indigenous rights.



Professor Sandy O'Sullivan
Wiradjuri

Professor Sandy O’Sullivan is a Wiradjuri transgender scholar, leading the Intimacies theme of the Centre for Global Indigenous Futures at Macquarie University. A current senior ARC Future Fellow, they are working on the Saving Lives project, exploring the complexity of First Nations LGBTQ+ artmaking and public imaginaries. They completed a 470-museum project on the representation and engagement of First Nations’ communities and continue to work on promoting community-informed complexities of First Nations identities within museums and keeping places.



Professor Bradley Moggridge
Kamilaroi

Professor Brad Moggridge is a Kamilaroi Water Scientist working in academia at UTS spending most of his career in research, policy, and regulation away from Country. He is building a body of evidence for mob to access for traditional water management, methodologies and to influence rights opportunities. He is aiming to encourage Indigenous generations to pursue interests in science, promote his Ancestors' knowledge of water and climate change, and maintain his impact with integrity.



Clark Webb
Gumbaynggirr, Bundjalung

Clark is a Gumbaynggirr and Bundjalung man from Coffs Harbour, is the founder and CEO of Bularri Muurlay Nyanggan Aboriginal Corporation. He also established the Gumbaynggirr Giingana Freedom School, the first bilingual Aboriginal school in NSW, promoting education through Gumbaynggirr language and culture to empower Indigenous youth.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Consultation

Methodology

The new Exhibition has the capacity to demonstrate best practice cultural exhibition design and curation. As such, the First Nations Consultation Team's overarching community consultation strategy was to prioritise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' input into the Exhibition's content and design.

The primary aims of this strategy were to:

- Inform Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across mainly NSW about the AM's upcoming Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Exhibition;
- Understand their views on the Australian Museum and whether they have visitation history at the AM; and
- Ask directly what they want (and do not want) to see in the Exhibition.

Consultation Format

The community consultation for this project involved a voluntary, short, nine-question survey to gather the feedback and opinions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to help inform and develop the Exhibition.

The survey responses will assist the First Nations Curatorial Team in deciding the themes, messages, ideas for object selection or commissioning works, facilitating evaluation and feedback to communities. The survey also collected relevant information and feedback on the AM. This will inform the AM's First Nations-related strategies for improving practices regarding First Nations cultural collections, engagement, and interpretation within the Museum.

Any surveys received after the survey collection period were still collected and reviewed by the First Nations Consultation Team, but these responses are not included in this Report.

The survey consisted of the following questions:

Question 1

Respondents were asked to identify whether they are Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, or neither.

Question 2

Respondents were asked to identify their Nation, language or cultural group or community (singular or plural, as relevant) if they are Indigenous.

Question 3

Respondents were asked to specify their residential postcode so the First Nations Consultation Team could ascertain the geographical reach of the survey.

Question 4

Respondents were asked if they would like to remain anonymous.

Question 5

Respondents were asked if they would be happy to be contacted to participate in a workshop with the First Nations Consultation Team, and if so, provide their contact details.

Question 6

Respondents were asked about when they last visited the Australian Museum and given the options of: "Never"; "Over 5 years ago"; "Between 3-5 years ago"; or "In the last 2 years". Respondents were then asked if they had seen a particular exhibition(s) at the AM.

Question 7

Respondents were asked what words/thoughts came to mind when they think of the Australian Museum.

Question 8

Respondents were asked what primary themes, topics, or stories they would want to see in the Exhibition.

Question 9

Respondents were asked what they would not want to see in the Exhibition.

Distribution

The First Nations Consultation Team aimed to capture meaningful information across a large representative sample size. Invitations to participate in the community consultation process (summarised in the AM Director & CEO’s ‘Have your say!’ accompanying letter) were issued verbally and via digital media. The survey was directly distributed to First Nations communities in the following manner:

- In-person: hard-copies of the survey were filled out by the facilitating AM First Nations team members or by the First Nations respondents themselves during conversations, face-to-face interviews, and participation in focus groups;
- Electronically: First Nations respondents clicked on a link which was emailed or forwarded to them, taking them to ‘The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Permanent Exhibition’ SurveyMonkey™ digital portal, or via the SurveyMonkey™ link posted on the ‘Indigenous Australian Culture’ Facebook™ page in addition to the ‘Indigenous Australian Culture’ Instagram™ page; and
- Via third-party consultants: in order to reach a broader pool of First Nations respondents, different community leaders and representatives with strong cultural and social connection with their respective communities were approached to help facilitate the distribution and collection of surveys. These included Fleur Magick Dennis (Western NSW), Amanda Jane Reynolds (South Coast, NSW), Rachael Cavanagh (mid-North Coast, NSW), and Deslyn Marsh with Nyumbar who connected with families from several Sydney schools.

Consultation was open to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Australia. However, there was a strategic focus on NSW-based communities since the AM is a NSW State Government institution, but also because the South-East region has historically been under-represented in the Museum’s past.

The First Nations Consultation Team further relied upon their own networks of personal and professional contacts within First Nations communities, largely via email contact. Digital surveys and hard-copy consultation packages were also sent to each Local Aboriginal Land Council in NSW as well as to several First Nations services, organisations and representative bodies.

The First Nations Consultation Team also took available opportunities to promote the Exhibition consultation by attending First Nations community events such as the 2023 Kinship Festival, the 2023 Giiyong Festival, and the 2024 Yabun Festival.

Interviews and focus groups were arranged upon request, after obtaining the necessary cultural permissions. The First Nations Manager, Strategic Projects travelled to the NSW North Coast and South Coast to consult with individuals and groups. The First Nations Consultation Team also visited various First Nations organisations, service providers and groups’ offices and sites, including: Mudgin-gal women’s group; Redfern Community Centre; Aboriginal Medical Services at Redfern, Dharawal, and Katoomba; and Nuru Gili Indigenous Programs at UNSW.

[The 2023 Australian Referendum] marked a confronting period which we acknowledge likely impacted on First Nations respondents in the form of “consultation fatigue”.

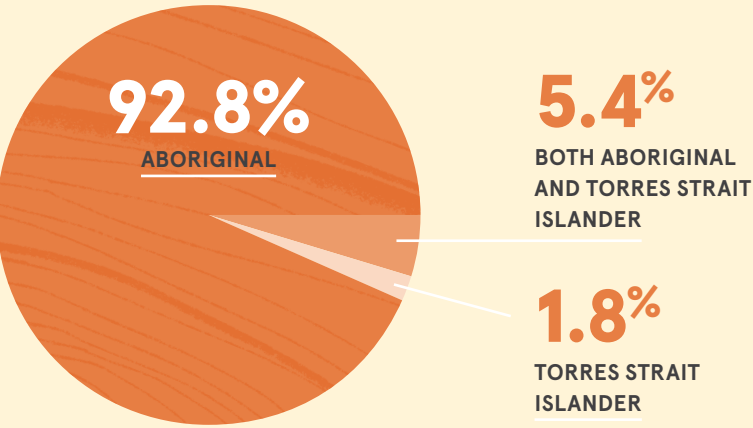
2023 Referendum

We note the distribution and engagement of this survey was impacted by the political events occurring in the lead-up to, and resolution of, the 2023 Referendum (which proposed to alter the Australian Constitution to recognise the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander “Voice” to Parliament).

This period was a time in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were constantly asked for their opinions on *The Uluru Statement from the Heart*, the matter of treaty, and the Referendum itself. It marked a confronting period which we acknowledge likely impacted on First Nations respondents in the form of “consultation fatigue”.

Results

Question 1
Are you Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?



861
persons identified as being Aboriginal only

As far as the First Nations Consultation Team is aware, at least 13 individuals who identified as being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander appear to have deceptively presented themselves as First Nations based on assessment of their other responses to the survey. Therefore, these 13 non-First Nations respondents are excluded from the results.

17
persons identified as being Torres Strait Islander only

50
persons identified as being both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

3 respondents chose to not to identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and instead only by their Nation or language group subsequently in Question 2.

For statistical clarity, we have included these 3 as First Nations identifying but acknowledge in this Report their rejection of the word “Aboriginal” and/or “Torres Strait Islander” as their cultural identity.

928
First Nations persons responded to the survey.

263 respondents stated that they are neither Aboriginal nor Torres Strait Islander. For the avoidance of doubt, this number does NOT include the 3 Aboriginal ‘Neither’ respondents noted in the bottom lefthand text.

Under Question 2, 20 of these respondents specified their individual non-Indigenous cultural heritage and a further 243 declined to furnish information of their individual cultural heritage, therefore they are not considered in the survey results to be First Nations persons.

276 respondents were neither Aboriginal nor Torres Strait Islander (including as noted above the 13 individuals determined to not be First Nations peoples).

This figure is interesting, considering that the survey clearly stated that it was intended only for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander persons to have their say. Their responses have been excluded from analysis in all subsequent questions.

Question 2

If Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, what is your Nation, Language Group, or Community?

The First Nations Consultation Team asked this question to ensure that they received feedback and opinions from a range of different First Nations cultural, language, and community groups.

The majority of respondents identified a Nation, cultural, language group or clan as opposed to a community (region, suburb or town).

226 different Nations, cultural, language groups, and clans were identified by the respondents.

241 of the respondents identified as belonging to multiple Nations, groups, and clans. 17 respondents identified this information was unknown to them.

19 people identified with a regional term of identity as follows:

- 18 – Noongar; and
- 1 – Murri

16 respondents identified ONLY by location or community including:

- 4 – La Perouse;
- 3 – Redfern and Woolloomooloo; and
- 2 – Kimberleys

3 respondents also identified their South-Sea Islander heritage, and 4 respondents stated that they did not know their specific Nation, cultural, language group, or clan due to being Stolen Generation.

136 respondents skipped this question.

A		Budawang	1	E			
		Bujiebara	1		Eora	2	
	Adnyamathanha	2	Bundjalung	59	Erub Island	5	
	Anaiwan	11	Bundji	1	G		
	Anguthimire	1	Bunuba	1		Gadigal	6
	Arabana	1	Bunurong	4		Gamayi	1
	Arrernte	6	Burra Burra	1		Gamilaraay	19
Awabakal	12	Burragorang	1	Gamilaroi		29	
		Burramattagal	2	Ganai		1	
B		Buthamarra	1	Ganamagal		1	
	Badimia	1	C	Gangulu	1		
	Butchella	3		Garigal	2		
	Badu Island	2		Gathang/Khuttung	3		
	Balladong	2		Gija	2		
	Bangarang	1		Girai Wurrung	1		
	Barada Bana	1		Gomeroi	32		
Barkindji	17	D		Gooniyandi	1		
Baryulgul	1			Goreng (Noongar)	1		
Bherwerre	1		Dharawal	14	Gubbi Gubbi	3	
Bidjigal	5		Darkinjung	2	Gudang Yadaykhenu	1	
Bidjara	3		Dharug	40	Gudhamang	1	
Bigambal	3		Deri	1	Gugubadun	3	
Bindal	1		Dharggah	1	Guhngalou	1	
Biripi	17	Dhungutti	32	Gumagi	1		
Birri Gubba	4	Dhurga	5	Gumbaynggirr	33		
Boandik	2	Dja Dja Wurrung	1	Gummu	1		
Boodjar	1	Djabugay	2	Gunditjmara	1		
Boorooberongal	2	Djirinjanj	3	Gundungurra	6		
Bpangarang	1	Djugan (Western Australia)	2	Gunggari	3		

Note: For clarity and conciseness, group names are listed under the most prevalent spelling to the best of the First Nations Consultation Team’s knowledge.

Gungulu	1
Gunnai	7
Gurindji	1
Guringai	4
Gwiyagal	1

I

Illowra	1
Irukandji	2
Iwaidja	1

J

Jagalingu	1
Jaggera	1
Jandi	1
Jaru	1
Jerrinja	3
Jiman	1
Jindabarra	2
Jingili	1

K

Kabi Kabi	3
Kala Kawaw Ya	1
Kalkadoon	1
Kalone	1
Kameragal	1
Kamilaroi	38
Kangawala	1
Kaureg	1
Kaurna	1
Kija	1
Kiriri	1
Kirrae Whurrong	1
Koa	1
Koedal (Saibai Island)	1
Koeybuway (Saibai Island)	1
Kokatha	1
Komet (Murray Island)	1
Kooma	8
Kougnaygal	1
Kuku Yalanji	3
Kulkalgau Ya	1
Kullili	1
Kunja	2
Kunyani	1
Kuringai	1
Kuuku Yalu	1

L

Larrakia	4
Latjilatji	2
Lurritja	1
Lutruwita	2

M

Mabuig Island	1
Mailaroi	1
Malak Malak	2

Malyangapa	5
Manbara	1
Mandandanji	6
Menang	1
Mer Island	1
Minjeribah	1
Minjungbal	7
Minyungbal	7
Moa Island	2
Monaro	4
Mudburra	1
Mumbra	1
Munнанjali	7
Muralag	1
Murray Island	1
Muurrai	1

N

Nari Nari	2
Narungga	1
Ngadjuri	2
Nganyaywana	1
Ngarrabul	2
Ngarigo	2
Ngarku	1
Ngarrindjeri	2
Ngemba	25
Ngiyampaa	8
Ngunnawal	6
Nive	1
Noongar	19
Nukunu	4
Nywaigi	1

P

Pakana	2
Palawa	12
Pitjantjatjara	1

Q

Quandamooka	2
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S

Saibai Island	1
Seisia	2

T

Thiin Mah	1
Thudgari	1
Thulgarrie	1
Thungatti	3
Thursday Island	2
Tiwi	1
Torres Strait	1
Trawlwoolway	1

U

Uindjiring	1
Undumbi	1

W

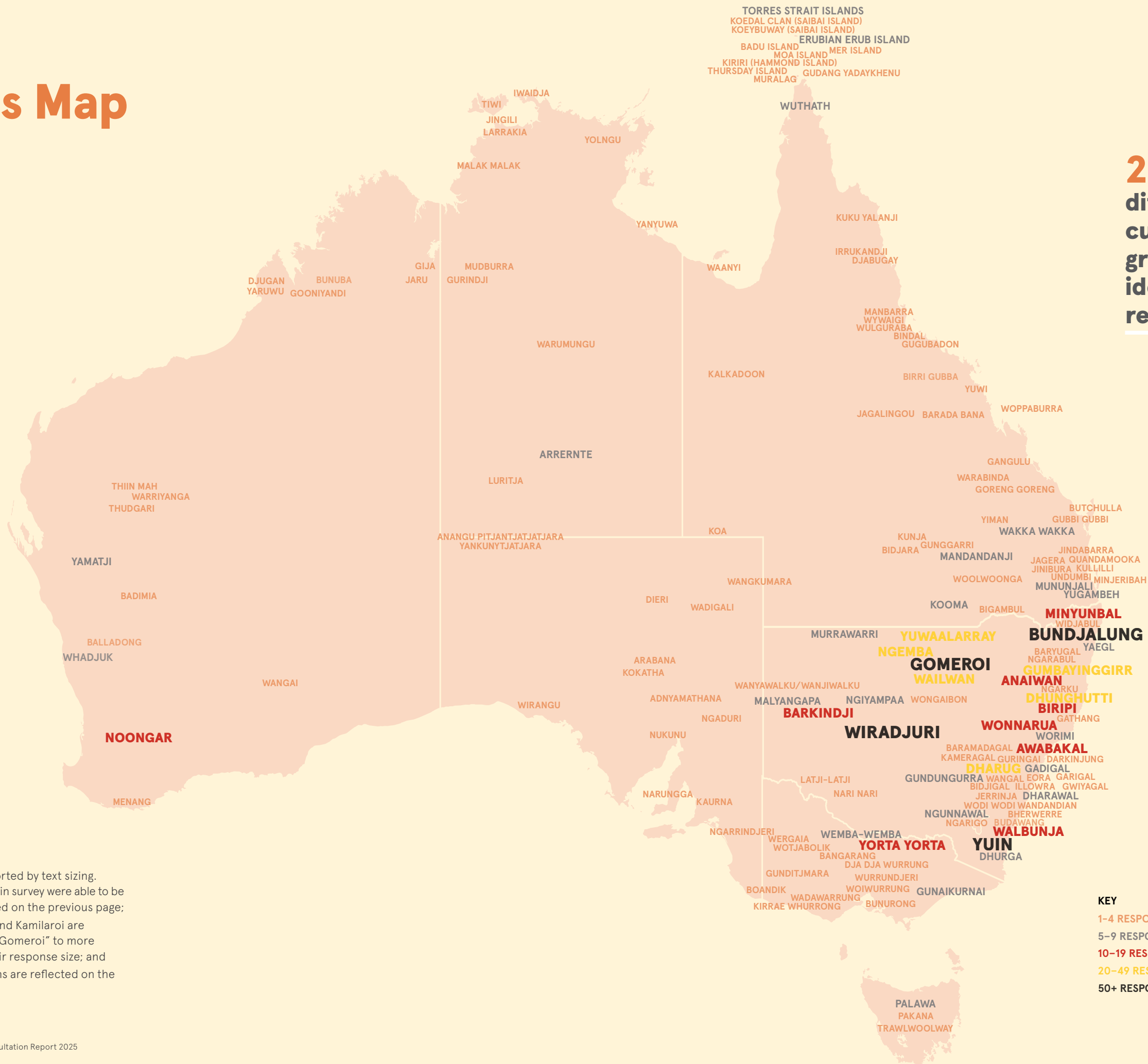
Waanyi	1
Wadawarrung	1
Wadi Wadi	1
Wadigali	2
Wadja	1
Wadjari	1
Wagyl Kiap	1
Wahlabul	4
Wahluu	1
Wailwan/Wayilwan	31
Wakka Wakka	7
Walbunja	13
Wallajen	1
Walundya	1
Wandi Wandian	4
Wangaibon	2
Wangal	2
Wangkumara	1
Wanyawalku	2
Warabinda	2
Warlawin	1
Warrianga	1
Warumungu	2
Wemba Wemba	6
Wergaia	1
Whadjuk	5
Widjabul/Wiabal	3
Wiradjuri/Wiradyuri	149
Wirangu	1
Wodi Wodi	2
Woiwurrung	1
Wongal	1
Wonnarua	17
Wooleoonga	1
Woppaburra	2
Worimi	8
Wotjabolik	3
Wulgurukaba	2
Wulmali	1
Wurundjeri	1
Wuthathi	4

Y

Yaegl	5
Yalada	1
Yamatji	6
Yankunytjatjara	1
Yanywa	1
Yaruwu	1
Yibaay Wagaan	1
Yiman	1
Yolngu	2
Yorta Yorta	16
Yuet	1
Yugambeh	9
Yuin	61
Yuwaalaraay	21

Nations Map

226
different Nations,
cultural, language
groups, and clans
identified by the
respondents.



- Notes:
- Mapping has been distorted by text sizing. Not all groups identified in survey were able to be located but are reflected on the previous page;
 - Gomerioi, Gamilaraay, and Kamilaroi are all represented under "Gomerioi" to more accurately visualise their response size; and
 - Respondent breakdowns are reflected on the previous page.

KEY
1-4 RESPONDENTS
5-9 RESPONDENTS
10-19 RESPONDENTS
20-49 RESPONDENTS
50+ RESPONDENTS

Question 3

What is your residential postcode?

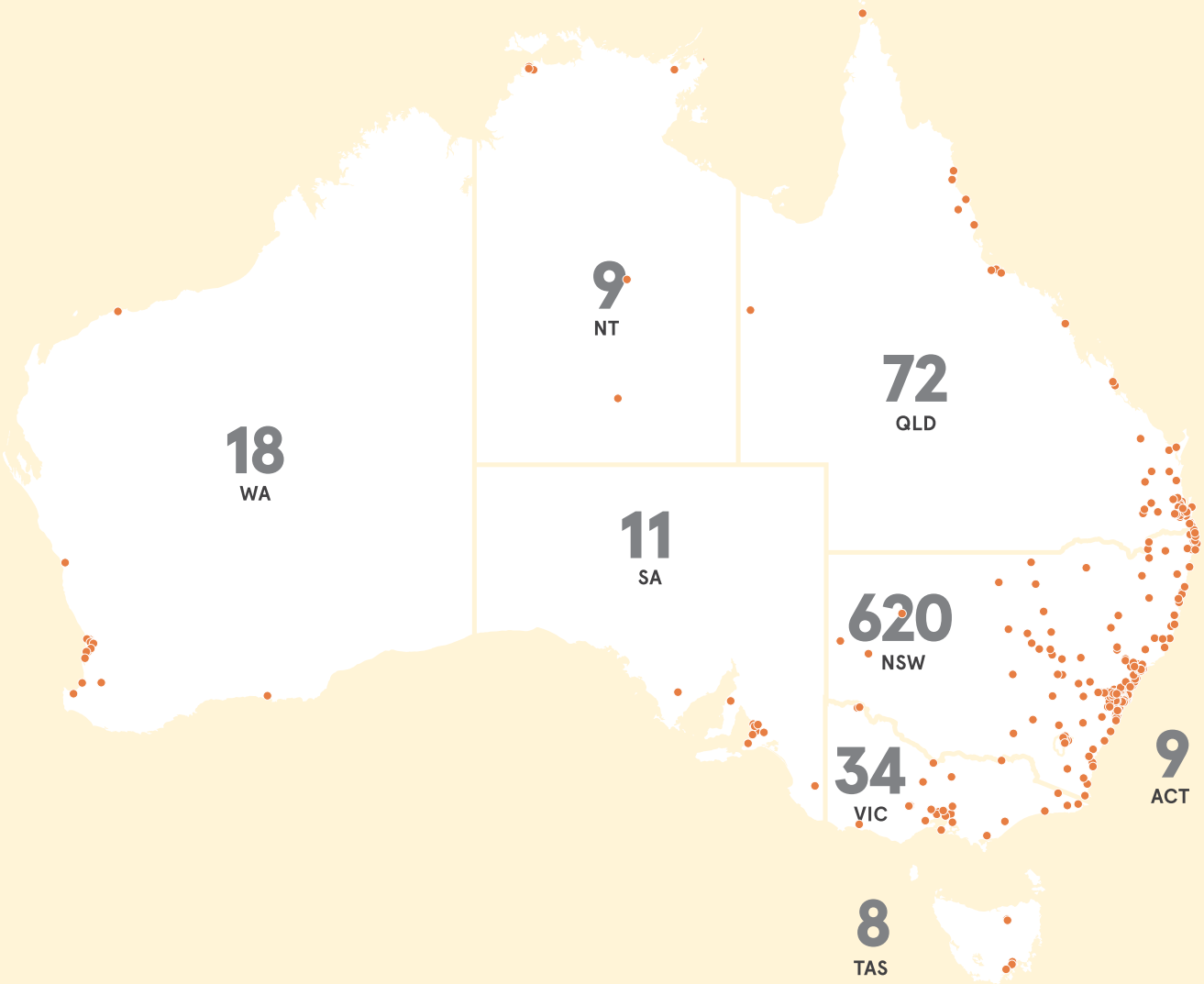
The First Nations Consultation Team asked this question to ensure that they received feedback and opinions from a range of different First Nations persons from locations across Australia.

Every Australian State and major Territory (i.e. Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory) is represented within the respondent group, with the vast majority of respondents living in NSW.

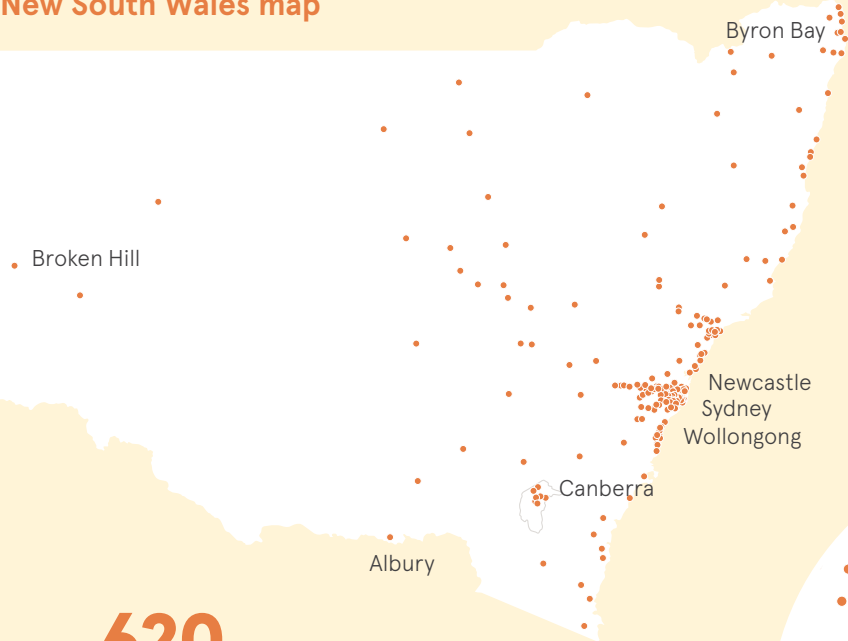
Urban, regional, and remote areas are accounted for in the respondent group, with the vast majority of respondents living in urban areas.

131 respondents skipped this question.

The map below shows the distribution of postcodes across Australia, and the total number of respondents from each State and major Territory.

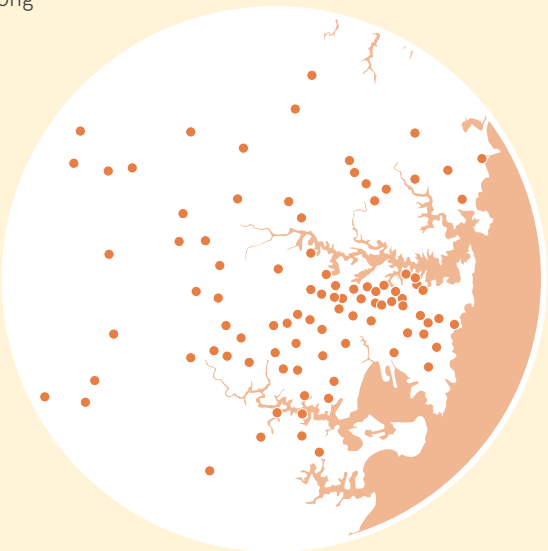


New South Wales map



620 responses were received from NSW.

Sydney region



Question 4

These responses will be collected for the consultation report and may be quoted anonymously. If you're to be quoted with your name, please write below.

This data was designed for internal AM use, and is not presented in the report.

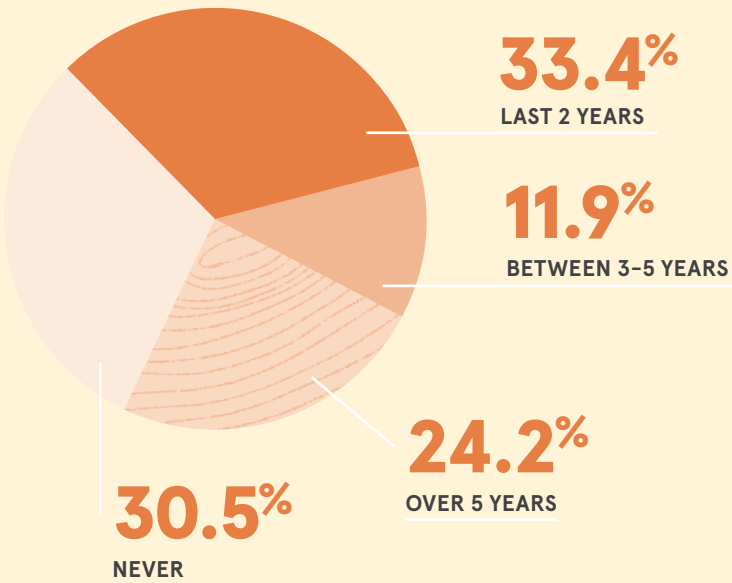
Question 5

Would you be willing to be involved in a workshop and/or be contacted by the First Nations team? Yes/No. If yes, please provide your contact details.

This data was designed for internal AM use, and is not presented in the report.

Question 6

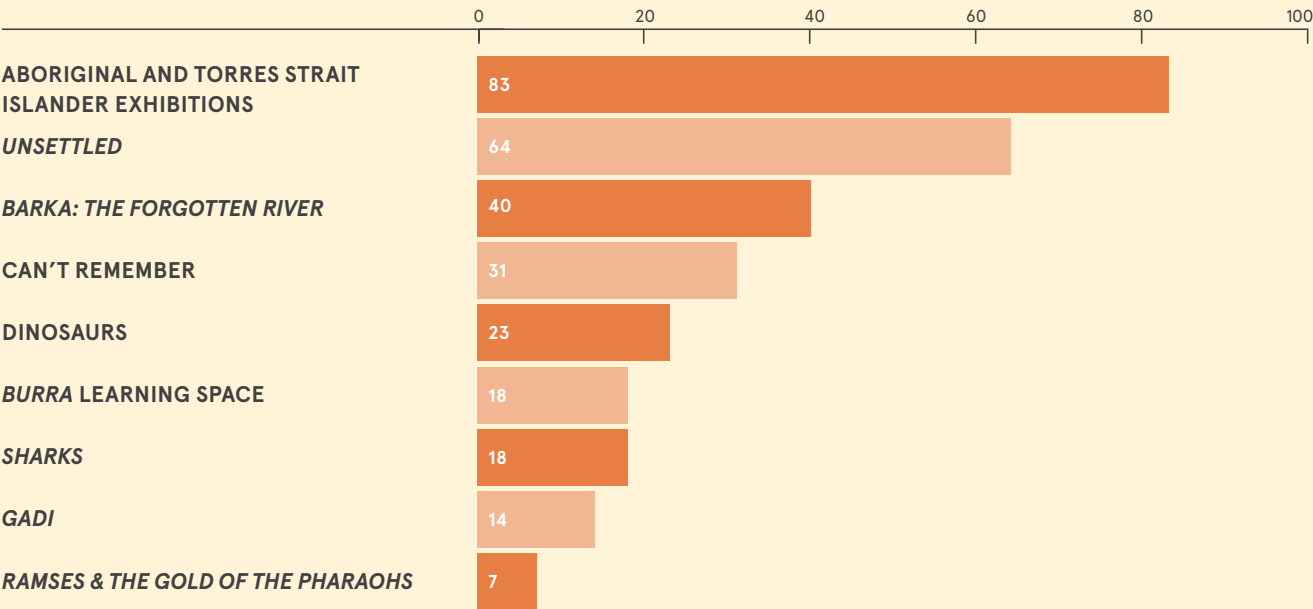
When did you last visit the Australian Museum?



This two-pronged question was asked to determine the respondents’ AM visitation history. This is useful data to ascertain how relevant the Museum has been to respondents, in terms of visibility and awareness of its offerings to First Nations communities. It will help the First Nations Curatorial Team to gauge levels of engagement, interest, and accessibility to the AM.

Did you see a particular exhibition?

408 respondents skipped this question. Snapshot of the most popular responses:

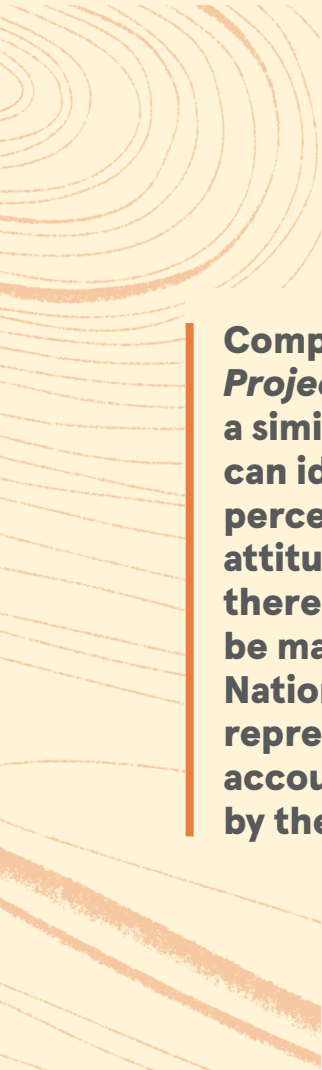
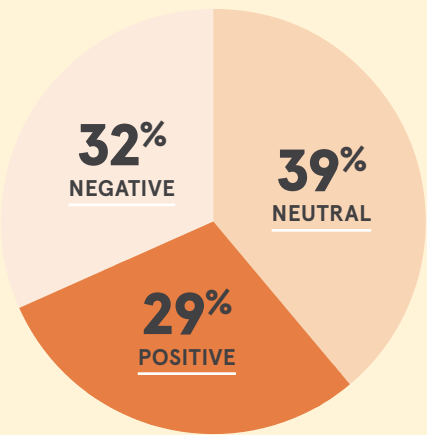


Question 7

What words/thoughts come to mind when you think about the Australian Museum?

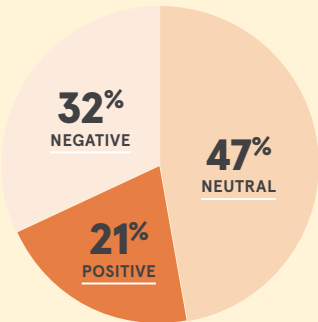
The First Nations Consultation Team asked this question to understand First Nations peoples’ personal reactions, opinions, and experiences of the AM. 745 answers were received, and many of these responses were applicable across categories, so this figure can be revised down to 555 categorically organised answers. 184 respondents chose to skip the question. In answering this question, many respondents described their feelings about museums generally, not only

the AM, and this is useful in reminding cultural institutions which engage with First Nations content and collections that we are interconnected in terms of reputation, motivation, and criticism from First Nations communities. The responses were broadly understood as positive in nature, indicating good feeling or favourable experience and understanding. Responses more of a negative nature predominantly referred to poor feeling, anger, or distrust. A neutral type of response was one which described the Museum without strong feeling either way, predominantly describing it as a building which houses objects and conducts research.



Compared to *The 2020 Project’s* findings for a similar question, we can identify improved perceptions and attitudes to the AM, but there is still progress to be made regarding First Nations engagement and representation, as well as accountability exercised by the Museum.

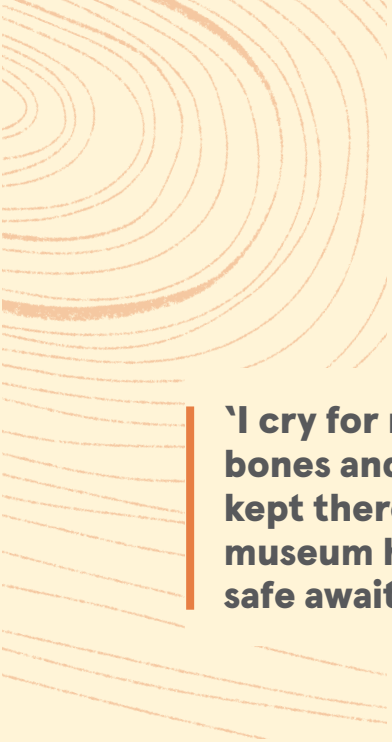
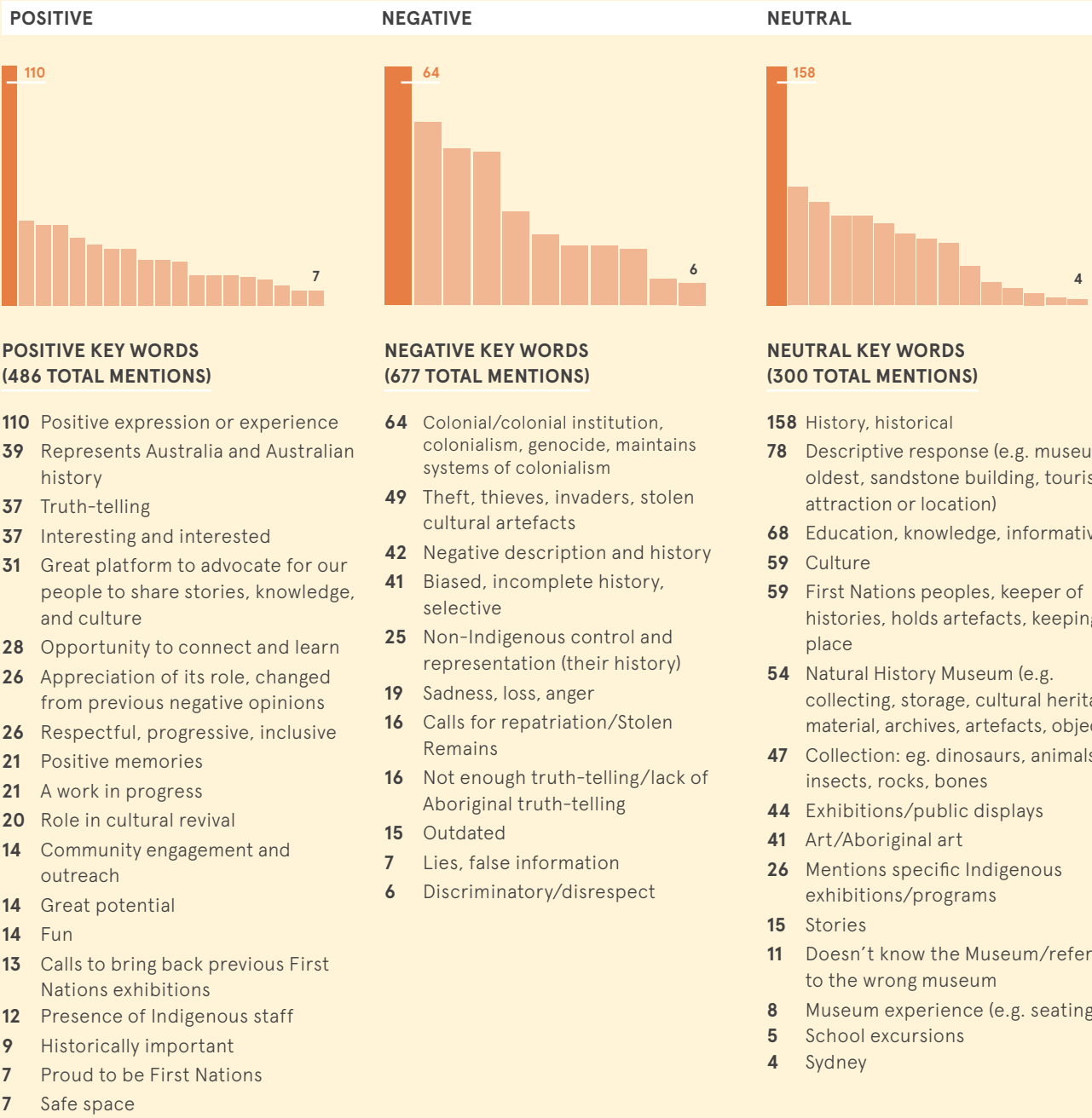
The 2020 Project report findings on the same question:



THERE HAS BEEN AN INCREASE FROM 21% POSITIVE SENTIMENT IN THE 2020 PROJECT REPORT TO 29% POSITIVE SENTIMENT IN THESE FINDINGS.

Question 7 continued

What words/thoughts come to mind when you think about the Australian Museum?



'I cry for my old people whose bones and belongings are kept there. I acknowledge the museum has kept these things safe awaiting their return.'

Snapshot of Question 7 responses

'Truth Telling First Nations collections and objects'

'Good for knowledge- for wider audiences
Expose truths- understand where we come from.'

'Strong First Nations leadership, positivity amongst staff and good collegiality, well considered, brave, challenging and relevant ways of framing collections within narratives.'

'Very proud to know AM acknowledge Australian Indigenous culture and work closely in consultation with the Indigenous communities nationwide'

'Prestigious, progressive, much better at consultation with mob'

'better than when I was younger'

'History and Artefacts, taxidermy, science, storytelling'

'I have only been on school trips so not a lot other than academia comes to mind'

'Dynamic these days, certainly broader scope of interest than when I used to go there as a child 40 or so years ago.'

'I wonder what the displays are like, As I'm in Queensland I only think about what is in the Qld Museum'

'Colonial, Oppressive, misplaced authority, traumatic, theft, extractive. Changing but needs to radicalise and be a loud ally if it is going to continue to call itself a custodian of our culture.'

'Stolen Collection to be seen or 'shared''

'Museums in general I think of the word stolen'

'Heavy- walking around with some of these artefacts that haven't felt black hands in so long. But also glad/thankful at times when I've gone with lots of mob.'

Disclaimer: Quotes have been reproduced verbatim.

Question 8

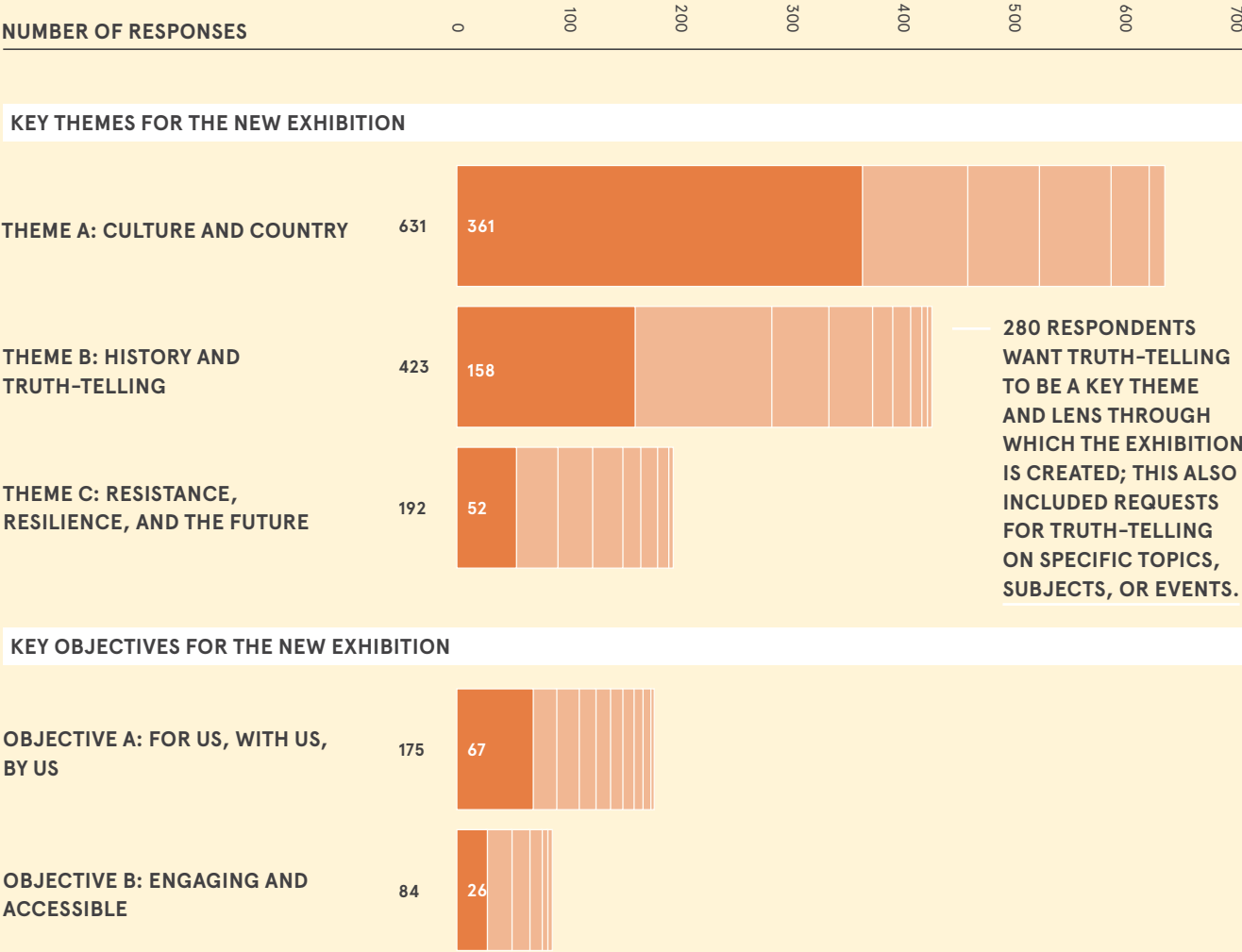
What are the primary themes, topics, or stories you would like to see in the new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander exhibition?

Respondents gave multiple answers regarding the objectives, themes, and topics that they would like to see presented in the new exhibition.

Percentages given are the number of respondents who identified a specific topic or objective.

It was possible to ascertain three predominate overarching themes, and two main objectives that First Nations respondents want executed in this space. This was determined by the number of responses received per topic, theme and objective.

168 people skipped this question.



THEME A: CULTURE AND COUNTRY (631 RESPONSES)

- 361 Culture
 - 94 Country
 - 64 Specific Nations' culture
 - 64 Stories across Country/diversity
 - 34 Daily life precolonisation
 - 14 Storytelling
- Additional Data Breakdown: Culture
- 124 Culture (general)
 - 75 Artefacts/objects/tools
 - 64 Art
 - 59 The Dreaming and spirituality
 - 56 Language
 - 41 Societal structure/family/community/kinship
 - 36 Contemporary practice
 - 35 Traditional practice
 - 29 Dance and music/instruments
 - 23 Boundaries/Nations/trade
 - 22 Botanical knowledge/specific plants and animals
 - 21 Daily Life
 - 17 Hunting/fishing/traps
 - 16 Food and medicine
 - 15 Adornment/possum cloak/shell
 - 13 Lore
 - 13 Living culture
 - 13 Women - cultural role
 - 12 Weaving
 - 11 Dwellings
 - 10 Songlines
 - 9 Ceremony/life markers
 - 6 Totems
 - 4 Other
 - 3 Elders - cultural role

- Additional Data Breakdown: Country
- 49 Land management and "Caring for Country"
 - 32 Country and connection to land
 - 20 First Nations knowledges and innovation
 - 16 Water and aquaculture
 - 15 Sky Country
 - 9 Fire practice
 - 5 Seasons

Disclaimer: Responses have been compiled into common topics. Additional Data Breakdown content reflects all of the subtopics identified under the common topics.

THEME B: HISTORY AND TRUTH-TELLING (423 RESPONSES)

- 158 Truth-telling
 - 122 Difficult Histories and Truth-telling (specific)
 - 51 History
 - 39 Aboriginal history
 - 18 History of colonisation and invasion
 - 16 Local history
 - 10 Historic documents
 - 5 History of 26th January
 - 4 Museum history
- Additional Data Breakdown: Difficult histories and Truth-telling
- 25 Stolen Generation and boys/girls homes
 - 18 Frontier Wars
 - 14 Massacres/murders/atrocities
 - 14 Impact of colonisation
 - 12 Missions
 - 12 Land theft/land rights
 - 8 Assimilation/government policies
 - 5 Genocide
 - 4 Blackbirding
 - 3 Hardship
 - 3 Cultural Site Destruction
 - 2 Slavery/indentured work/Stolen Wages
 - 2 Native Police

THEME C: RESISTANCE, RESILIENCE, AND THE FUTURE (192 RESPONSES)

- 52 Survival, resilience and activism
- 37 Future and healing/reconciliation
- 31 Pride and accomplishments/achievements
- 27 Contemporary issues and political movements
- 16 Heros, activists, leaders and specific peoples
- 15 Revitalisation
- 10 Specific activism - Freedom Rides, Tent Embassy
- 4 Other

**OBJECTIVE A: FOR US, WITH US, BY US
(175 RESPONSES)**

- 67 Representation
- 21 Winhangadurinya space
- 20 Collaborative design
- 15 First Nations staff and leadership
- 13 Cultural protocol and values observed
- 11 Repatriation/stolen objects
- 10 Object permissions
- 8 *Unsettled* exhibition
- 7 Appropriate context
- 3 Safe space

Additional Data Breakdown: Representation

- 46 Elders/specific individuals stories
- 44 First Nations perspectives
- 14 Perspectives from many Nations
- 13 Diverse perspectives
- 13 Youth stories
- 11 Women’s perspectives
- 8 Bush and grassroots stories
- 8 LGBTQIA+SB perspectives

**OBJECTIVE B: ENGAGING AND ACCESSIBLE
(84 RESPONSES)**

- 26 Interactive, engaging, and accessible
- 22 Design specifics
- 16 Workshops, tours, events, and training
- 11 School/children specific
- 5 More First Nations displays
- 4 Online and travelling content

OTHER (62 RESPONSES)

- 19 Other
- 14 Unclear
- 5 N/A
- 13 Everything
- 11 Unsure

Disclaimer: Quotes have been reproduced verbatim. Responses have been compiled into common topics. Additional Data Breakdown content reflects all of the subtopics identified under the common topics.

‘Self-determined and responsive works to the materials already collected. Themes of the right-to-reply, sovereignty, ecology and Indigenous ways of living, being, doing in real life.’

‘It’s a shame when I know more about Colonialism and it’s History and it’s ongoing Intergenerational Traumatic Impacts towards my People and in the same instance the Colonisers have no idea about The Colony.’

Snapshot of Question 8 responses

‘Stories told through multiple ways. If oral stories, animations of dreamtime, interactive/immersive’

‘Diversity of Indigenous Australia and different mob, lore and culture both pre and post invasion. Dynamic and interactive. Blak led!’

‘Exhibition put together and curated by Indigenous people. not consultation but collaboration with mob making decisions on the final exhibition. This is important to make sure it’s consistent with cultural values and information is correct.’

‘First nations Science – how stories and songlines reflect the documentation (oral) of histories and sciences. Ethically sourced artworks and artefacts. More women’s related traditions and not all about the men’

‘How the land was cared for. How the seasons were disifered. How the land was managed using fire to assist the bush. How there are VERY special, spiritual places that MUST be protected at all costs. How the seasons changed what foods they lived on.. And just exactly how, they lived alongside of and with the land rather than destroying and raping the land’

Disclaimer: Quotes have been reproduced verbatim.

‘Stories of country associated with objects from country’

‘Resistance stories, queer, intertribal/national relations/trade, Native Title, Mining and agriculture (precolonial), trade routes, religion and culture, Water navigation (ngaro)’

‘No white splaining, no Cook crap, First Nations stories by mob’

‘Survival. Resilience. Strength. Understanding. Importance of the earth.’

‘First Nations sophistication, through in depth analysis of the local people including foods, medicines, social organisation including the role of mark making (petroglyphs). Telling the story of contemporary Aboriginal people of Sydney.’

‘more truth about the dark genocides against our people’

‘... Don’t pretend like the massacres and generational genocide did not happen. SHOW IT!’

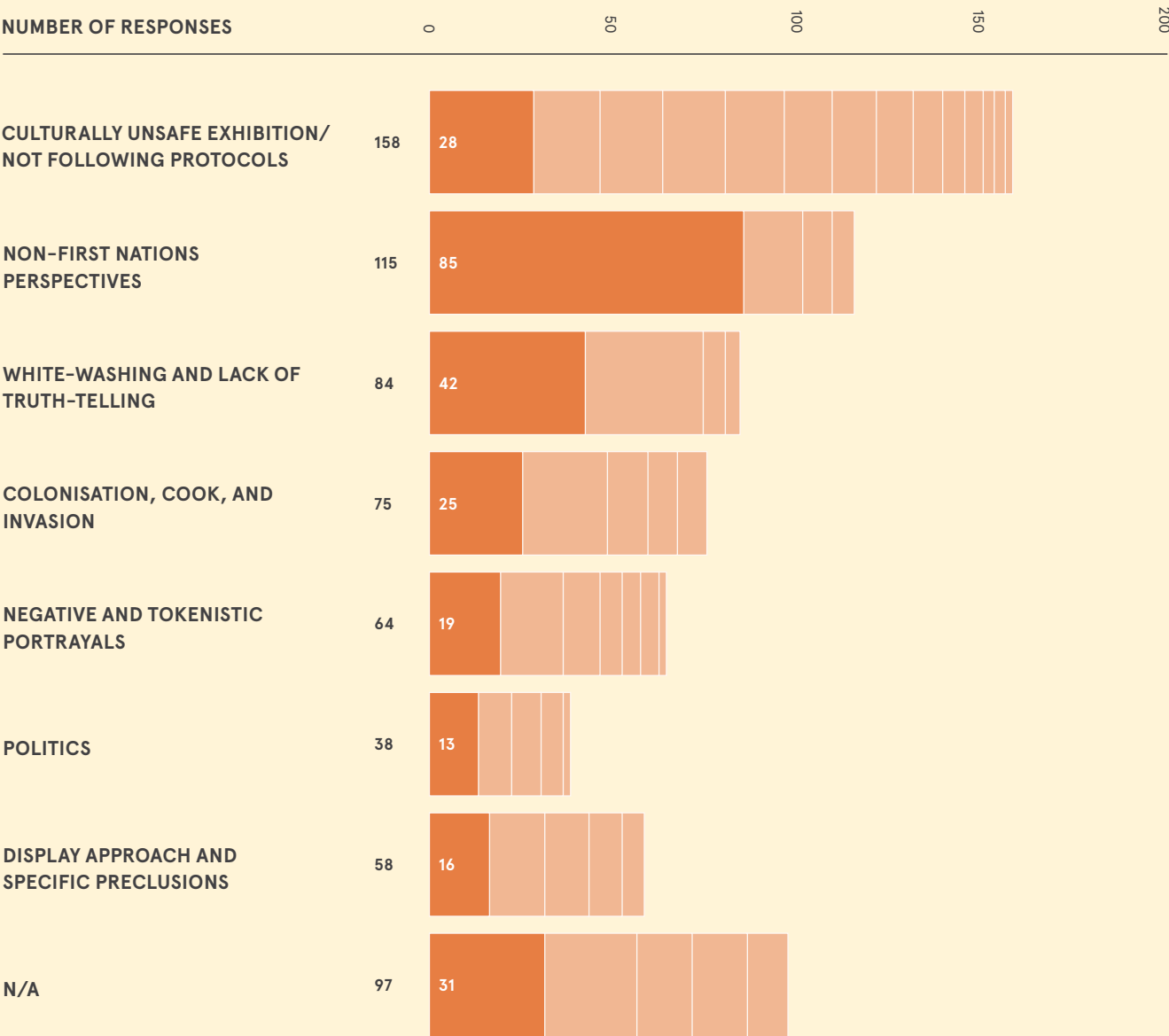
I would love to see more women’s specific exhibits about their roles in culture. I would love to see more about land rights and the surrounding language groups

Question 9

What do you NOT want to see in the new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander exhibition?

Respondents gave multiple answers regarding the objectives, themes, and topics that they would like to see presented in the new exhibition, this were recorded across subjects. Percentages given are the number of respondents who identified specific topics or objectives.

311 people skipped this question and 97 respondents gave answers which were unclear, unsure, or indicated including all. Outside of those responses it was possible to ascertain 7 different answer types.



‘No bones of ancestors in the museum. No stories told by white people. Let blackfullas tell our own stories.’

CULTURALLY UNSAFE EXHIBITION/NOT FOLLOWING PROTOCOLS (158 RESPONSES)

- 28 Human remains
- 18 Stolen objects
- 17 Traumatic or triggering images,objects,space
- 17 Objects without permission/consultation
- 16 Secret/Sacred/restricted objects
- 13 Objects not repatriated
- 12 Sensitive cultural knowledge
- 10 Objects and stories without appropriate context
- 8 Inauthentic art/practices
- 6 Images of deceased peoples
- 5 Inappropriate objects
- 3 Misleading or incorrect cultural knowledge
- 3 Exploitation of First Nations artists
- 2 First Nations speaking on other First Nations stories, art, objects

NEGATIVE AND TOKENISTIC PORTRAYALS (64 RESPONSES)

- 19 Tokenism
- 17 Stereotypes and negative portrayals
- 10 Racism
- 6 Hate/negativity
- 5 Victimhood/suffering
- 5 Deficit Lens
- 2 Non-Aboriginal art and appropriation

POLITICS (38 RESPONSES)

- 13 Local Aboriginal Land Councils and recognition of specific cultural groups
- 9 Named public figures
- 8 Politics – general
- 6 Specific language terms i.e Blackfulla, Mob
- 2 The Voice

NON-FIRST NATIONS PERSPECTIVES (115 RESPONSES)

- 85 Non-First Nations perspectives/interpretations
- 16 Non-First Nations objects and stories
- 8 Non-First Nations leadership/agency
- 6 Non-First Nations tour guides/presenters

WHITE-WASHING AND LACK OF TRUTH-TELLING (84 RESPONSES)

- 42 Fabrication, false history, lack of truth-telling
- 32 White-washing/sugarcoating/watering down
- 6 Glorification of colonisation and colonial figures
- 4 Biased or unbalanced views

DISPLAY APPROACH AND SPECIFIC PRECLUSIONS (58 RESPONSES)

- 16 Other
- 15 Specific art styles
- 12 Non-engaging and static display
- 9 Homogenous portrayal of culture/no singular style/desire for variety
- 6 Neutral exhibition design conditions

COLONISATION, COOK, AND INVASION (75 RESPONSES)

- 25 Cook
- 23 Colonisation and invasion
- 11 Colonial perspectives
- 8 Colonial/settler objects and stories
- 8 First Fleet

OTHER (97 RESPONSES)

- 31 Unsure/don’t know
- 25 N/A
- 15 Tell It All
- 15 Unclear/ambiguous response
- 11 Nothing

Disclaimer: Responses have been compiled into common topics.

Snapshot of Question 9 responses

*‘Stuff on the First Fleet no “they gave us x,y,z”
We are not thankful for invasion!’*

*‘False stories being told about the history
of Australia. e.g. how the British discovered
Australia. False. The British invaded Australia.
All the macasures of the Aboriginal people.’*

*‘Anything that does not have full and frank
disclosure and agreement and input of peoples
concerned. You know you are doing it better
these days so just keep working at it.’*

*‘Exhibitions about different mobs without
their context. Not too much non indigenous
explanations about stuff’*

*‘Open to all knowledge as long it’s culturally
appropriate’*

‘White wash colonisation Ancestors on display’

*‘Recounts by white people, anything
underpinned by a deficit lens, non-First Nations
peoples leading in spaces and taking up space
that Mob should be curating and leading in,
anything tokenistic/offensive or exclusive.’*

*‘Don’t let white people tell our stories, let our
mob tell our stories No gammon stories from
white man’*

‘Influence from land councils and government’

‘It should all be taught so people know the past’

Disclaimer: Quotes have been reproduced verbatim.

**‘I want it to be
provocative to tell the
true history. No sugar
coating the truth. Involve
our next generations and
all our family and skin
groups to tell our stories.’**

Community Sentiment Study

Methodology

In 2023, the AM engaged specialist market research company Fiftyfive5 to conduct a study of the wider Australian public to ascertain the sentiments and understandings Australians had of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, peoples, and cultures. This additional data was collected to help inform the First Nations Curatorial Team developing the new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Exhibition. It aimed to capture the public’s preconceived notions, barriers to learning, and the most prevailing stereotypes that exist in the public mind about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures.

The study was conducted with a sample size of 2004 participants living in Australia aged 18+ who completed an 18-minute online survey - n=2,004 (± 2.2% margin of error at 95% CI). The table below outlines the final sample achieved and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) population figures that this sample was postweighted to. Triple Interlocking quotas were utilised based on ABS population figures for age, gender and state to ensure a representative sample was achieved in each specific cell (e.g. 18-24 year old males in NSW). Additionally, there were quotas placed on region and minimal quotas on First Nations peoples, and culturally and linguistically diverse peoples. Weighting was also conducted post-fieldwork using generations and regions. It was not needed for First Nations status, education, or income based on ABS Census figures.

Pew Research Centre was also a key resource to ensure questions were asked appropriately. When analysing sub-groups of interest (e.g. demographics), appropriate statistical significance testing has been run, always at 95% confidence interval.

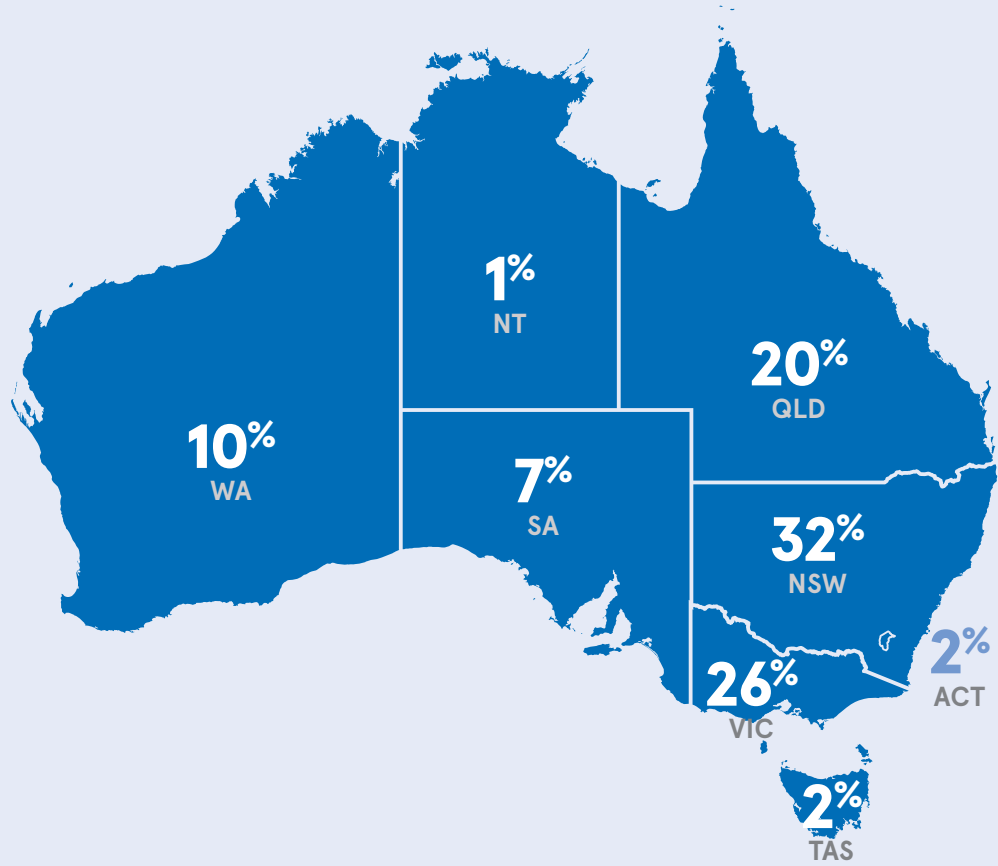
Criteria	Categories	Population Figures	Sample achieved (unweighted)	
Gender	Man or male	49%	48%	n=955
	Woman or female	50%	52%	n=1047
	Non-Binary or gender fluid	<1%	<1%	n=2
Age	18-34	29%	25%	n=499
	35-54	34%	37%	n=732
	55-74	26%	30%	n=602
	75+	10%	9%	n=171
Region	Metropolitan cities	69%	76%	n=1532
	Regional areas	31%	24%	n=472
State	NSW/ACT	34%	32%	n=654
	VIC/TAS	28%	27%	n=559
	QLD	20%	20%	n=417
	WA	10%	11%	n=225
	SA/NT	8%	9%	n=182
First Generation	First generation Australian (Born overseas)	34%	23%	n=453
First Nations	Identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	3%	4%	n=70

*Sensitive content material. Words and descriptions may be culturally sensitive and not normally used in public or community contexts. The statements tested and wording used are not reflective of the AM's or Fiftyfive5's views or values but were used to understand attitudes and perceptions some Australians may hold about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, histories and cultures.

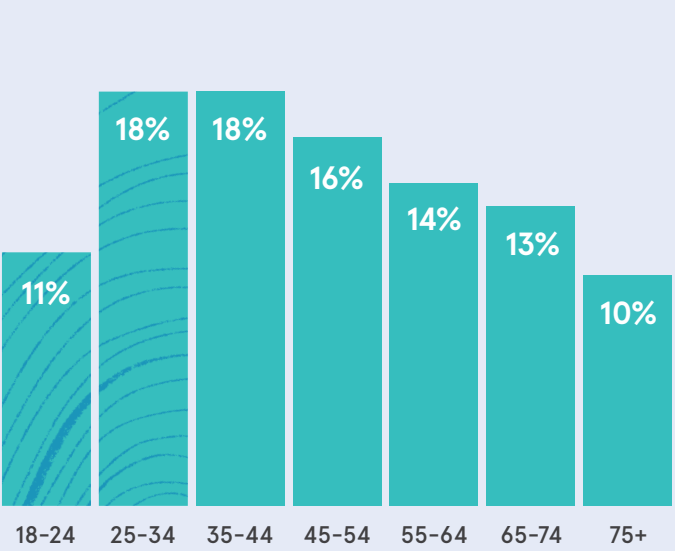
Sample Profile

Location

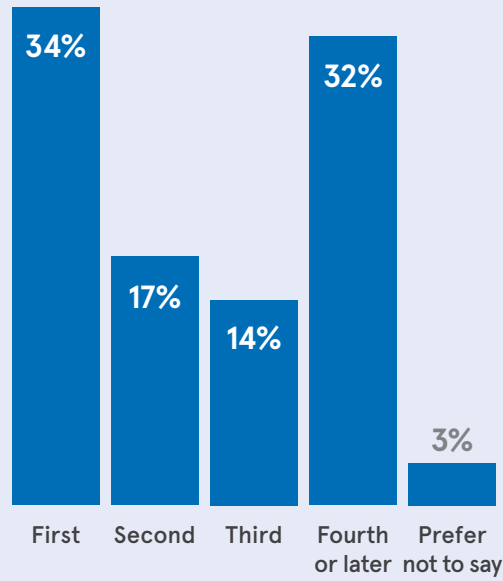
Major cities 72%
Inner regional 20%
Outer and remote 8%



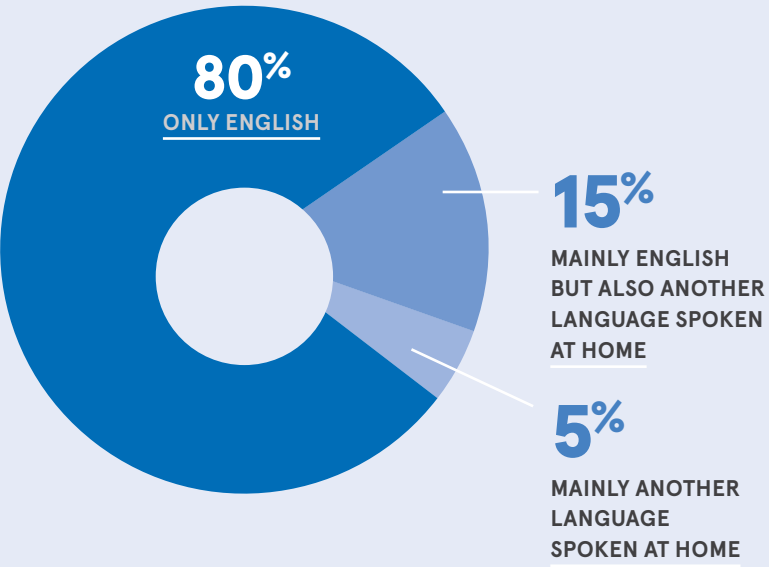
Age



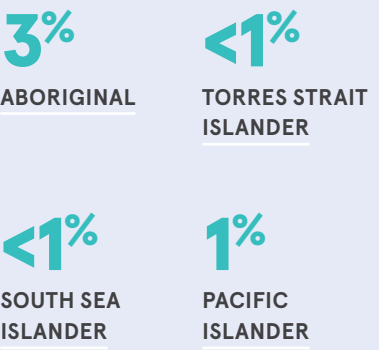
Generation



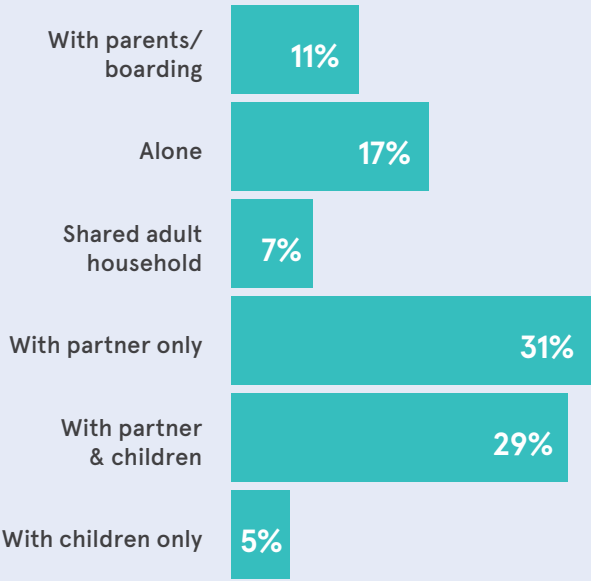
Language Spoken at Home



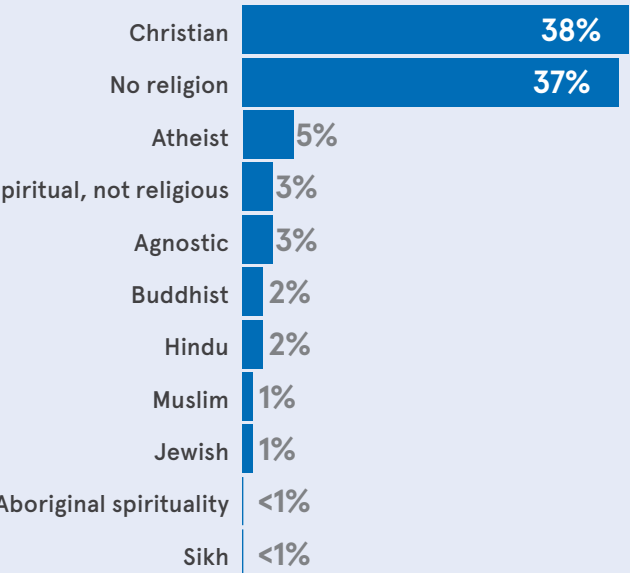
First Nations and Pasifika Status



Household



Religion



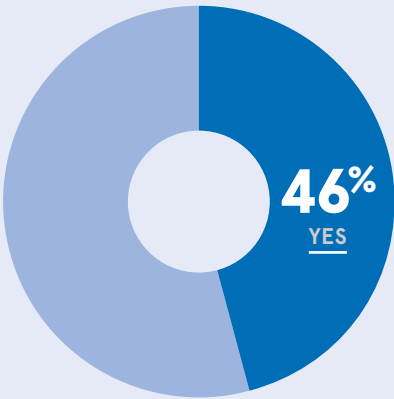
*Chart may not add to 100% as 'Prefer not to say' has not been shown.

Fiftyfive5 'Always Will Be' Community Sentiment Study, November 2023. Base: Australia population 18+ representative n= 2004 (weighted data)
S2. Please type in your age in years. S4. Please type in your home postcode S5. What generation of Australian are you? S6. What language do you speak at home? Z6. Do you identify as ... ? Z7. What is your religion? Z13. Which of the following best describes the household you live in?

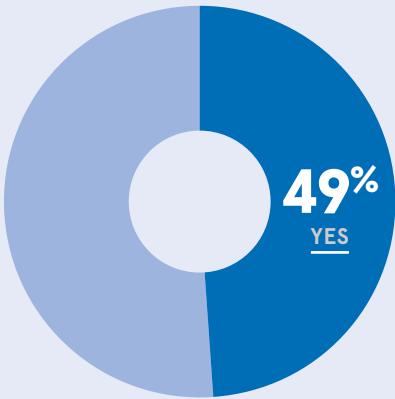
Data Analysis

Personal Connection

Amongst my friends (personal, work or otherwise), there is at least one person who identifies as having an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background



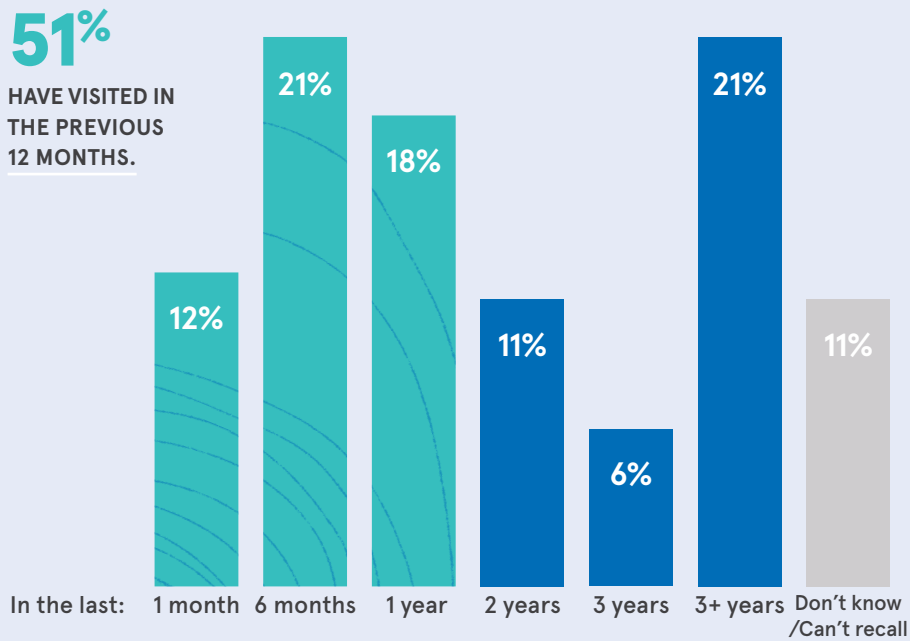
I know someone who identifies as having an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background, but I wouldn't categorise us as friends



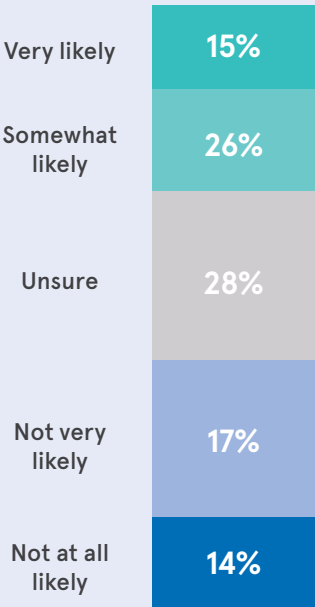
FEWER THAN
1 in 2
AUSTRALIANS SAY THEY PERSONALLY KNOW AN ABORIGINAL AND/OR TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PERSON.

Cultural Institution Visitation

Last time you/they visited a cultural institution



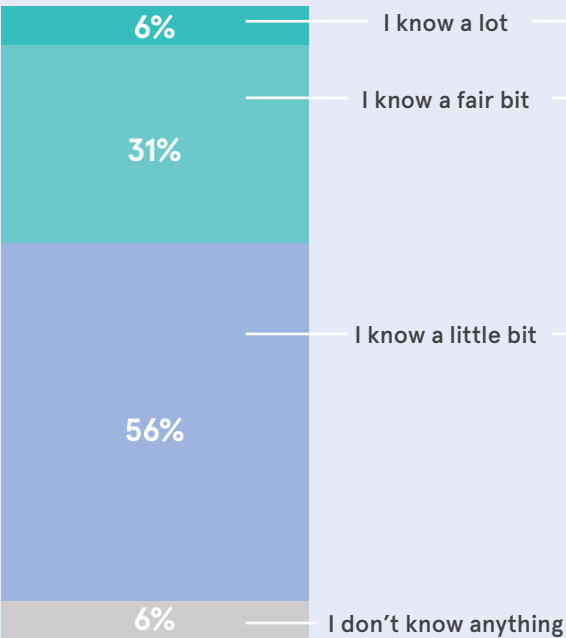
Likelihood to visit an exhibit relating to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples



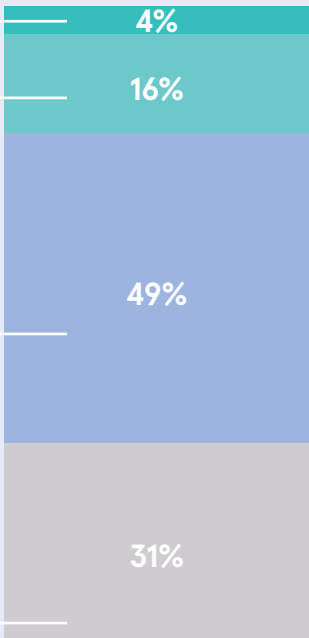
Fiftyfive5 'Always Will Be' Community Sentiment Study. November 2023. Base: Australia population 18+ representative n= 2004 (weighted data)
Z3. Please answer yes or no on each of the below, based on your personal connection to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples? Z1. When was the last time you visited an arts or cultural institution such as a museum or art gallery? Z2. And how likely are you to visit an arts or cultural institution to see an exhibit relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' histories or cultures in the next year?

Knowledge of Cultures and Histories

Knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' histories and cultures



Knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' histories and cultures in area/suburb



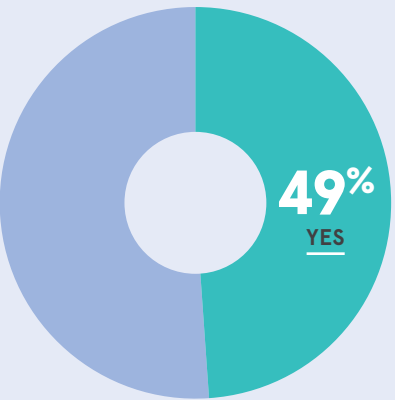
JUST OVER
1 in 3
AUSTRALIANS CLAIM TO KNOW AT LEAST A FAIR BIT ABOUT ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES' HISTORIES AND CULTURES.

THIS DROPS TO
1 in 5
WHEN ASKED ABOUT THEIR LOCAL AREA.

*Chart may not add to 100% as 'Prefer not to say' has not been shown.

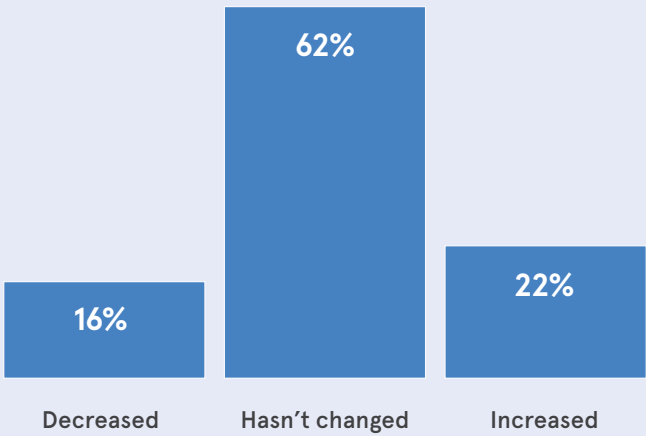
Local Knowledge

I know the name of the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Country, language group, or community of the land where I live



Level of Interest

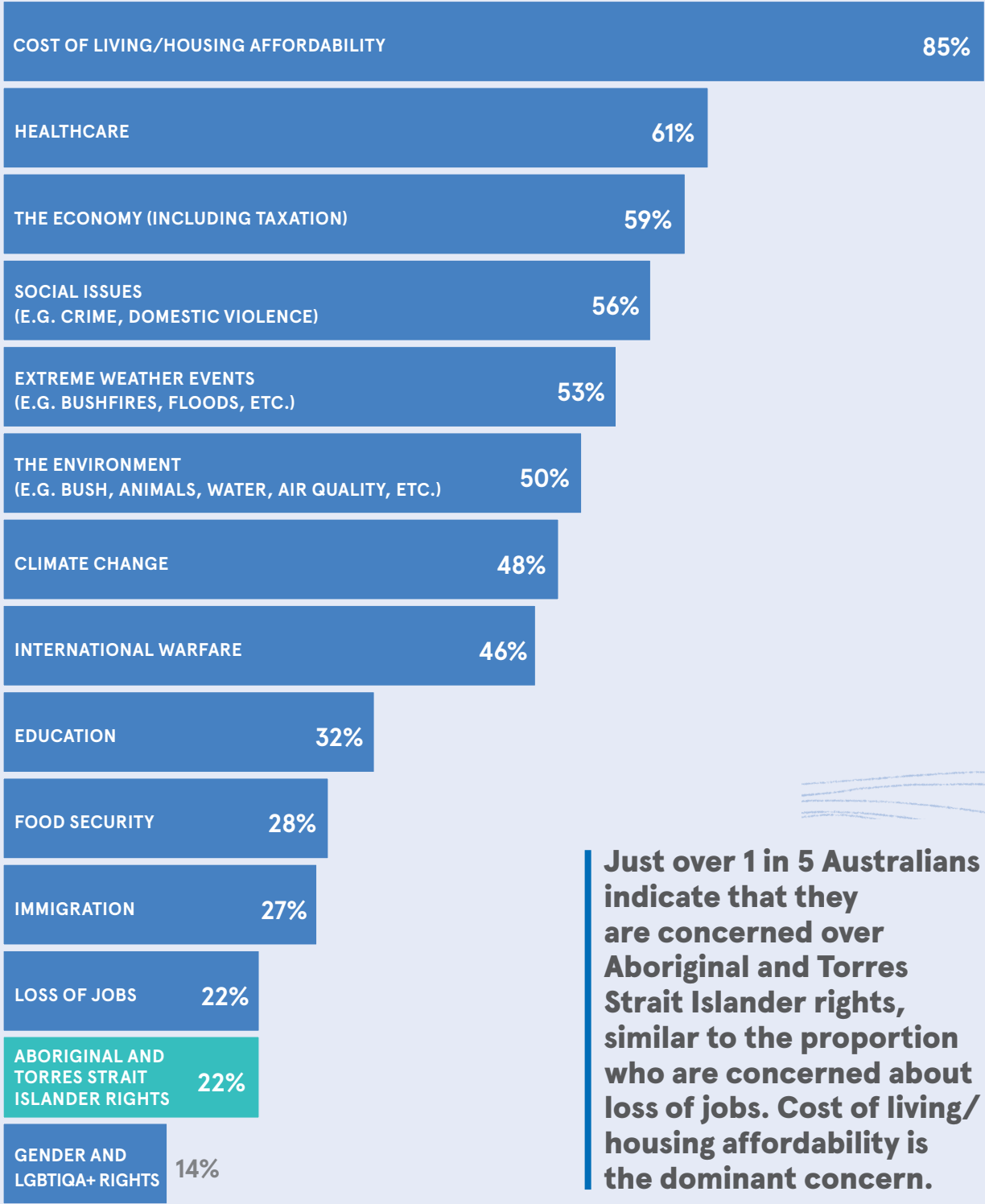
Level of interest toward Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' histories and cultures in last 3 years



Fiftyfive5 'Always Will Be' Community Sentiment Study. November 2023. Base: Australia population 18+ representative n= 2004
A4. Which of the following best describes how much you know about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' histories and cultures? A5. Which of the following best describes how much you know about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' histories and cultures in the area/suburb you live in? A6. And which of the below best describes your level of interest towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' histories and cultures in the last 3 years? B17. I know the name of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander country, language group, or community of the land where I live?

Audience concerns

Which, if any of the following are you concerned about? (multiple selections permitted)

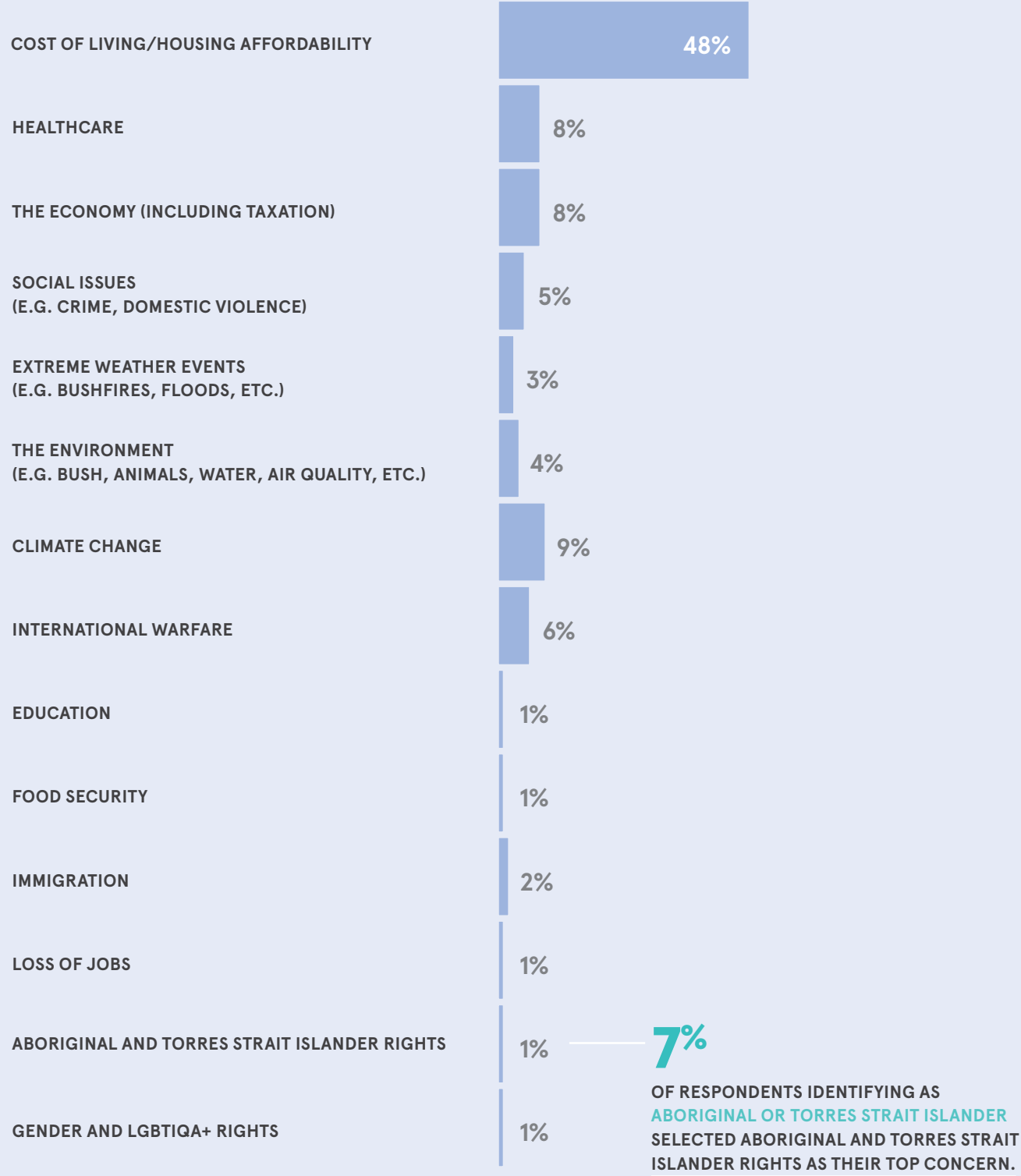


Just over 1 in 5 Australians indicate that they are concerned over Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights, similar to the proportion who are concerned about loss of jobs. Cost of living/housing affordability is the dominant concern.

Fiftyfive5 'Always Will Be' Community Sentiment Study. November 2023. Base: Australia population 18+ representative n= 2004, A0. Which, if any of the following are you concerned about?

Audience concerns

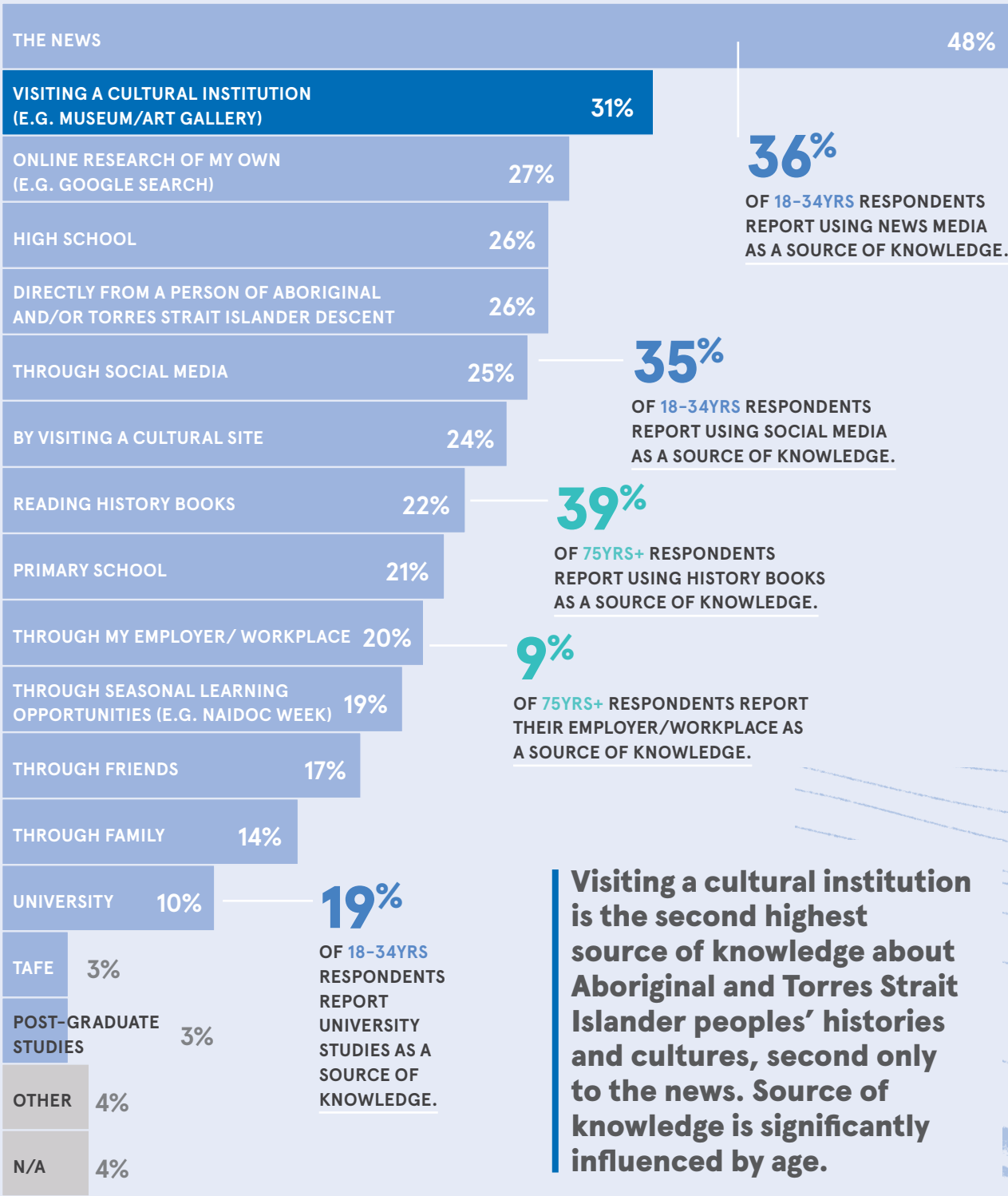
And which of these are you most concerned about? (Single selection permitted)



*Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. Fiftyfive5 'Always Will Be' Community Sentiment Study. November 2023. Base: Australia population 18+ representative n= 2004, A1. And which of these are you most concerned about?

Source of Knowledge

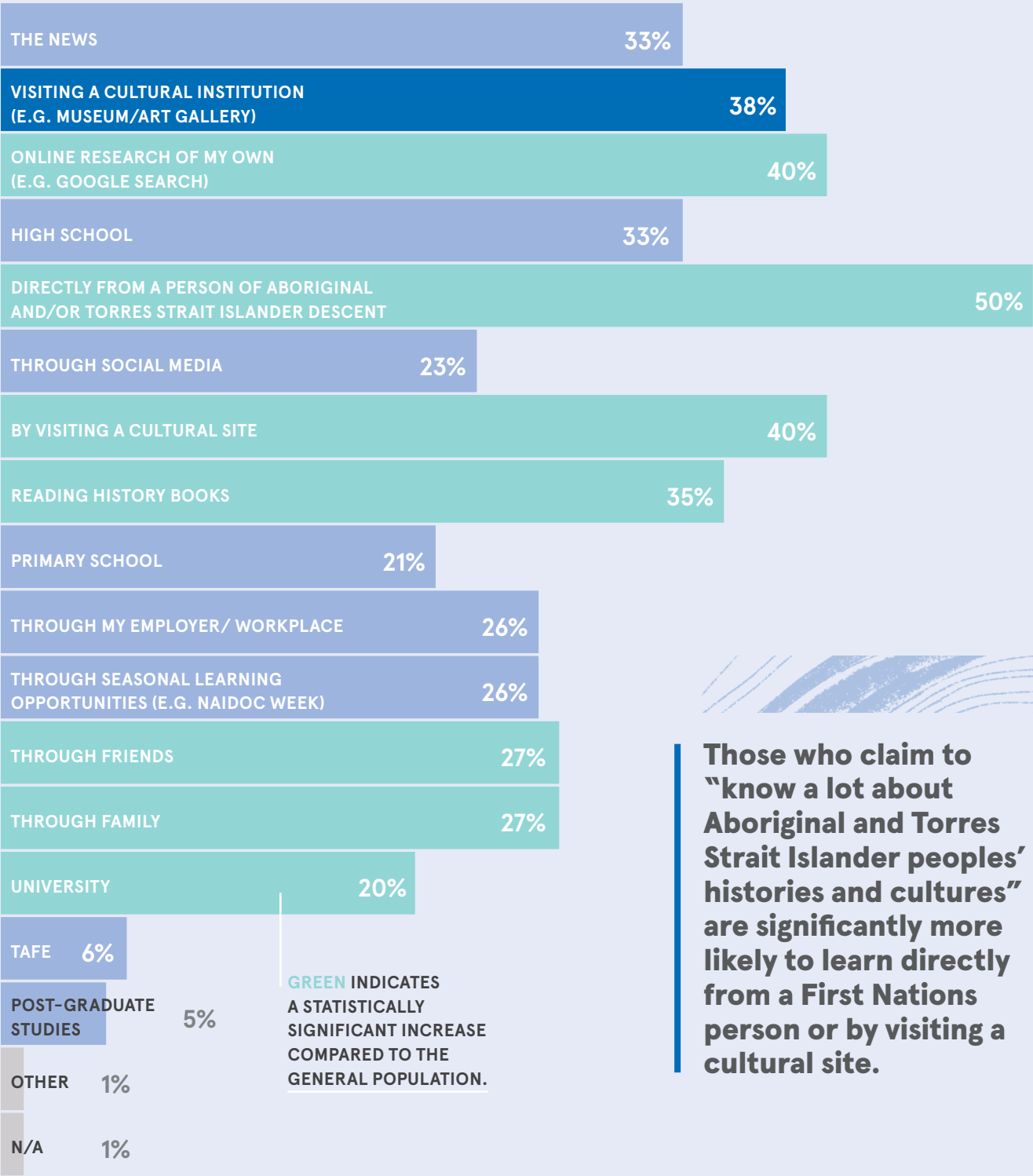
Where have you learned about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ histories and cultures?



Fiftyfive5 ‘Always Will Be’ Community Sentiment Study. November 2023. Base: Australia population 18+ representative n= 2004
A7. Where have you learned about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ histories and cultures?

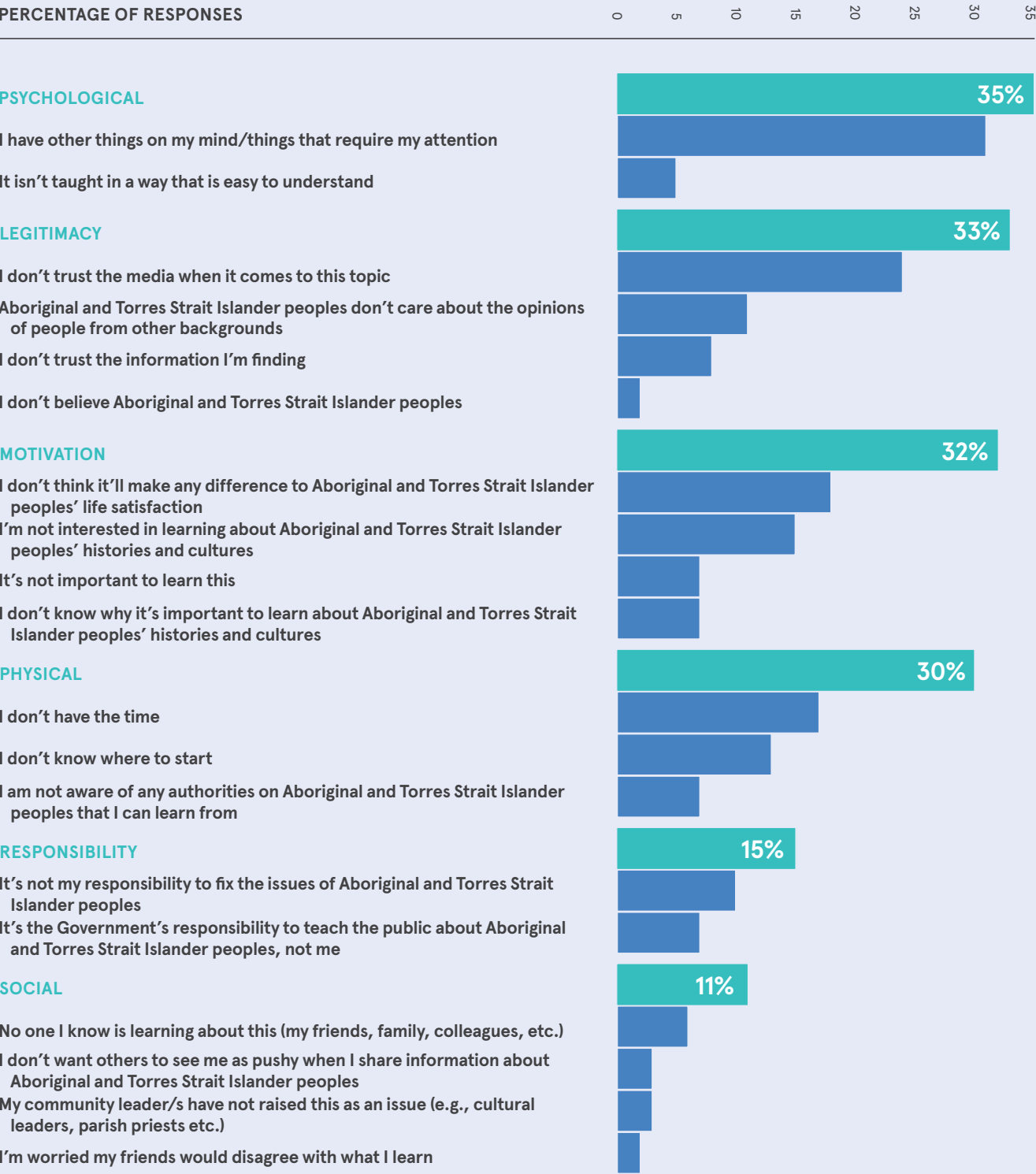
Source of Knowledge Among Those Who “Know a Lot”

Where have you learned about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ histories and cultures?



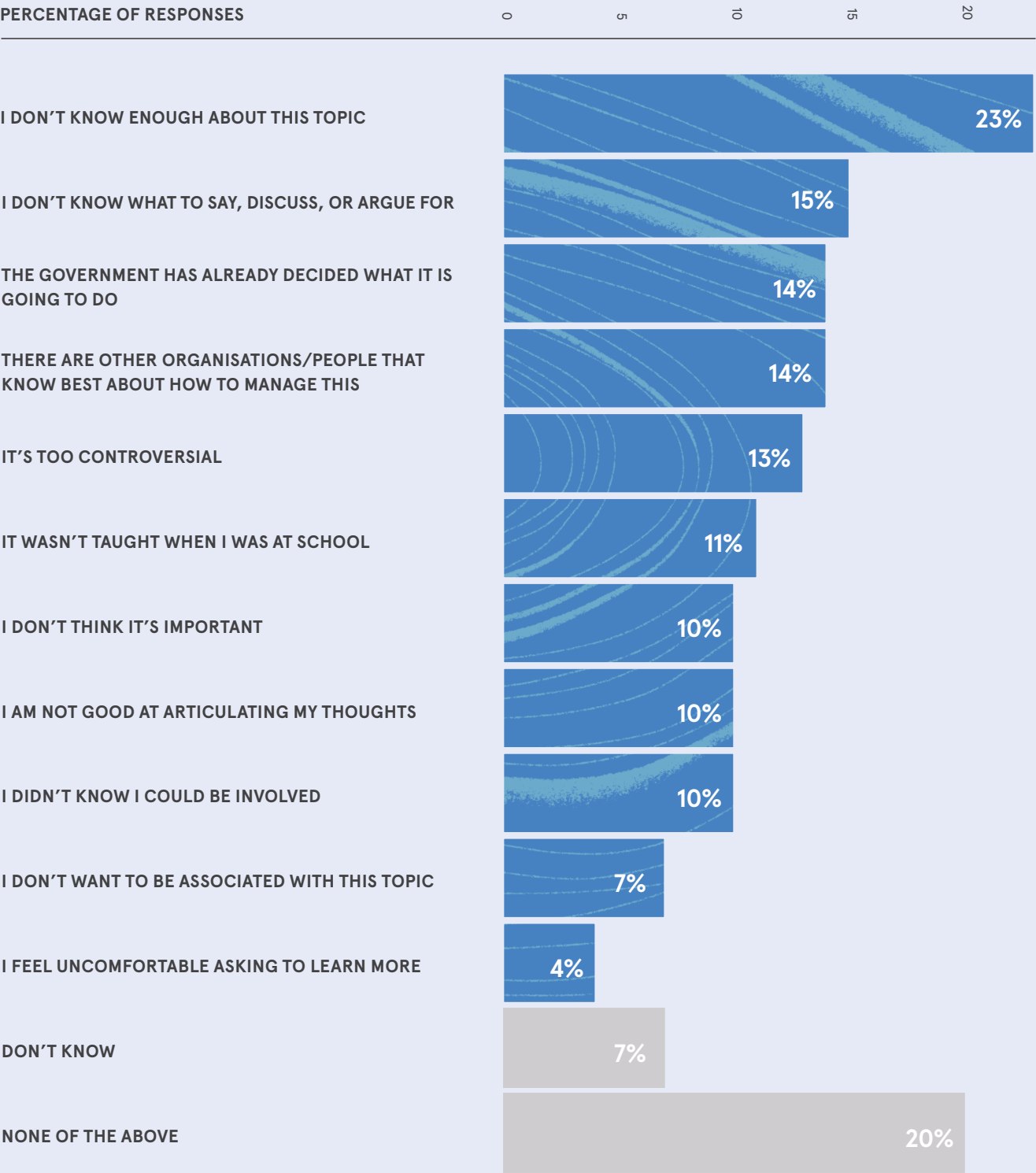
Fiftyfive5 ‘Always Will Be’ Community Sentiment Study. November 2023. Base: Claim to know a lot about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ histories and cultures
N=144. A7. Where have you learned about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ histories and cultures?

Barriers to Learning about First Nations Peoples’ Histories and Cultures



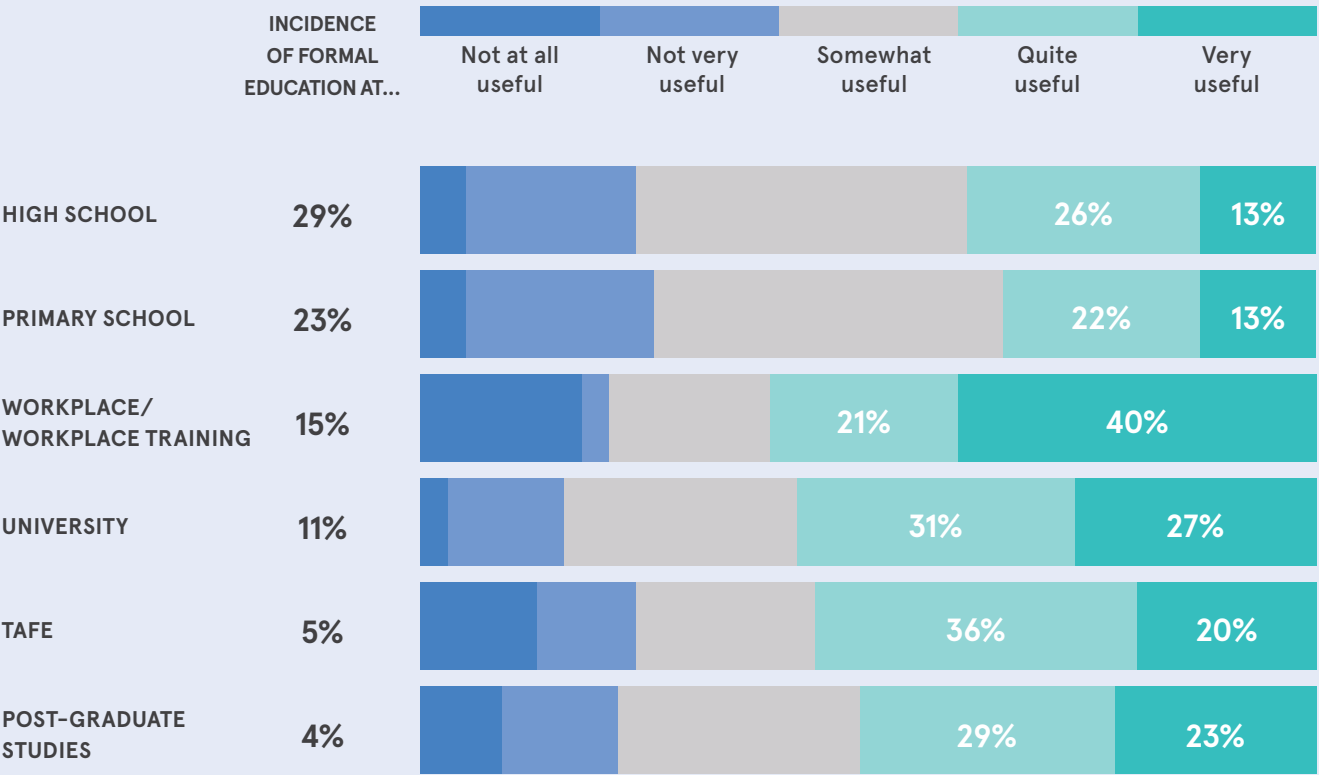
*Figures add to more than 100% as participants could choose more than one response.
Fiftyfive5 'Always Will Be' Community Sentiment Study. November 2023. Base: Australia population 18+ representative n= 2004
A8. Which of these reasons, if any, would hold you back from learning more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' histories and cultures?

Challenges to Engaging with First Nations Peoples’ Histories and Cultures



*Figures add to more than 100% as participants could choose more than one response.
Fiftyfive5 'Always Will Be' Community Sentiment Study. November 2023. Base: Australia population 18+ representative n= 2004, A9. And thinking about potential reasons that might hold you back from engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' histories and cultures, which of the following, if any, apply to you?

Incidence of and Usefulness of Formal Education about First Nations Peoples’ Histories and Cultures

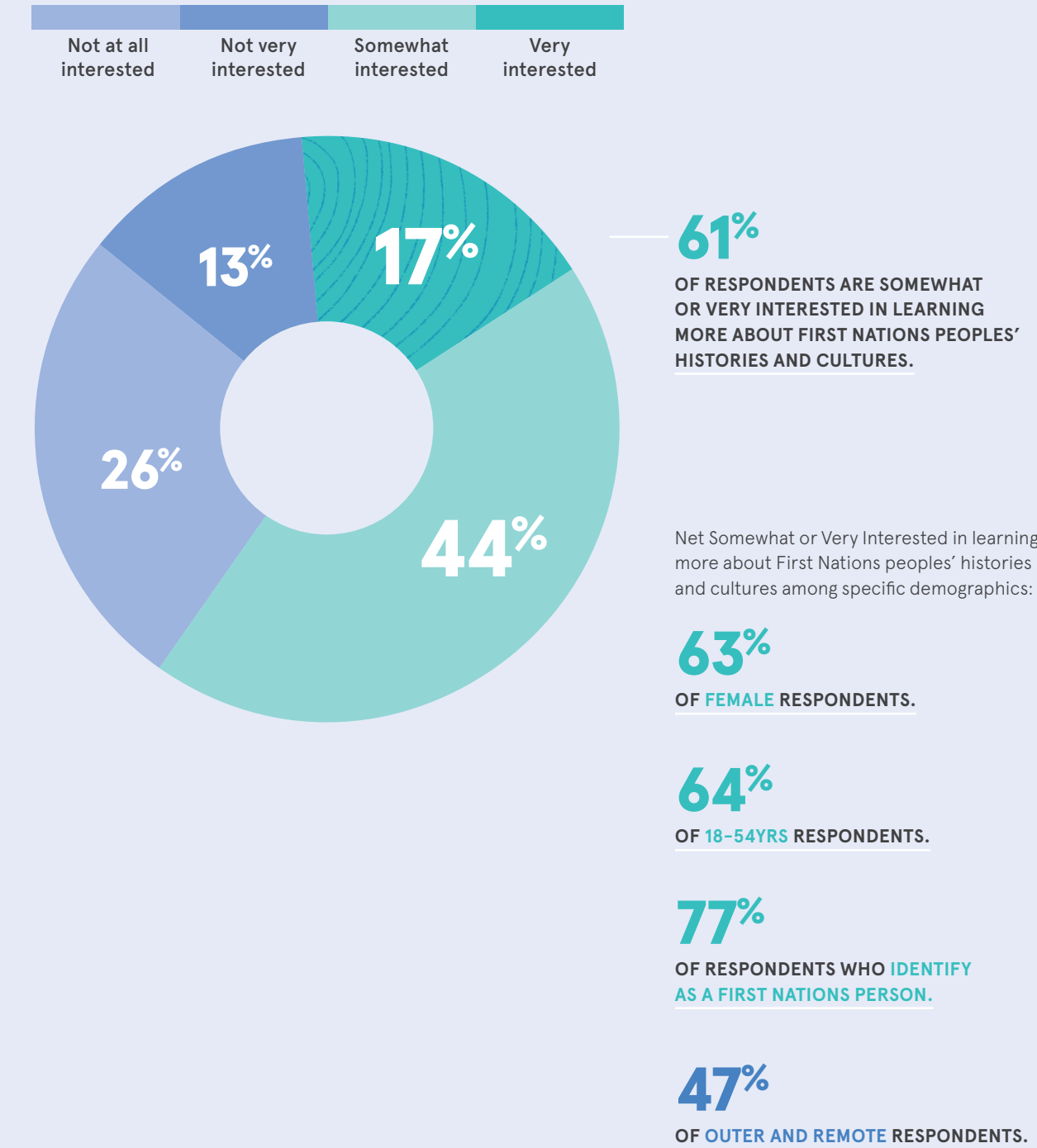


While primary and high school are the most common places where Australians are educated about First Nations peoples’ histories and cultures, these are rated the least useful. The workplace is the third-most common place to receive education, although perceptions of usefulness are polarised.

*Incidence of formal education figures do not add to 100% as some participants have not had any formal education on First Nations Peoples’ Histories and Cultures.

Fiftyfive5 ‘Always Will Be’ Community Sentiment Study. November 2023. Australia population 18+ representative n= 2004. A11. In what part of your formal education, if any, did you have a subject or topic dedicated to the study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ histories and cultures? A12. And how useful was each level of schooling in teaching you about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ histories and cultures? High school n=592, primary school n=488, workplace n=283, university n=228, TAFE n=102, post-graduate studies n=85.

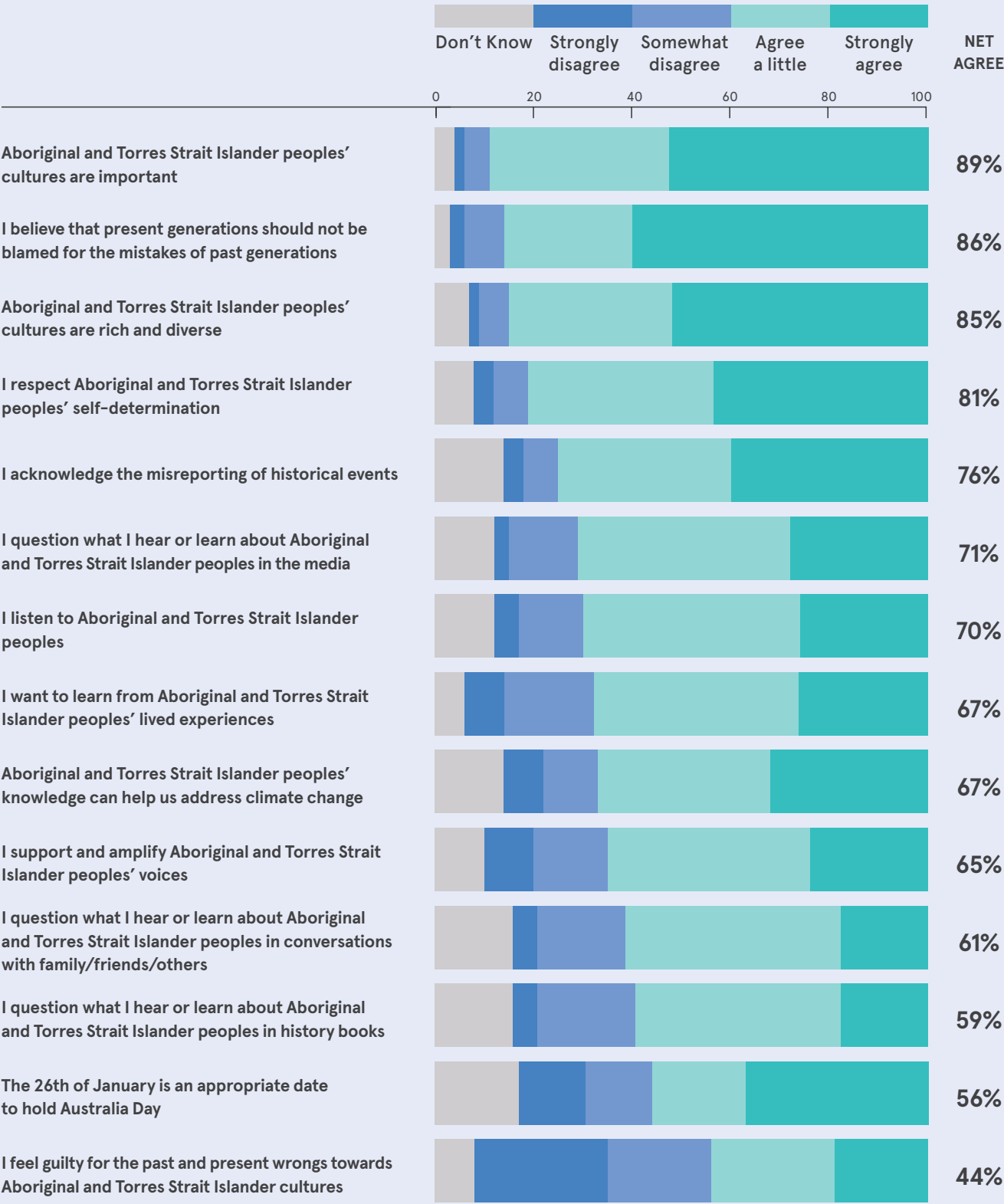
Interest in Future Education on First Nations Peoples’ Histories and Cultures



*Figures add to more than 100% as participants could choose more than one response.

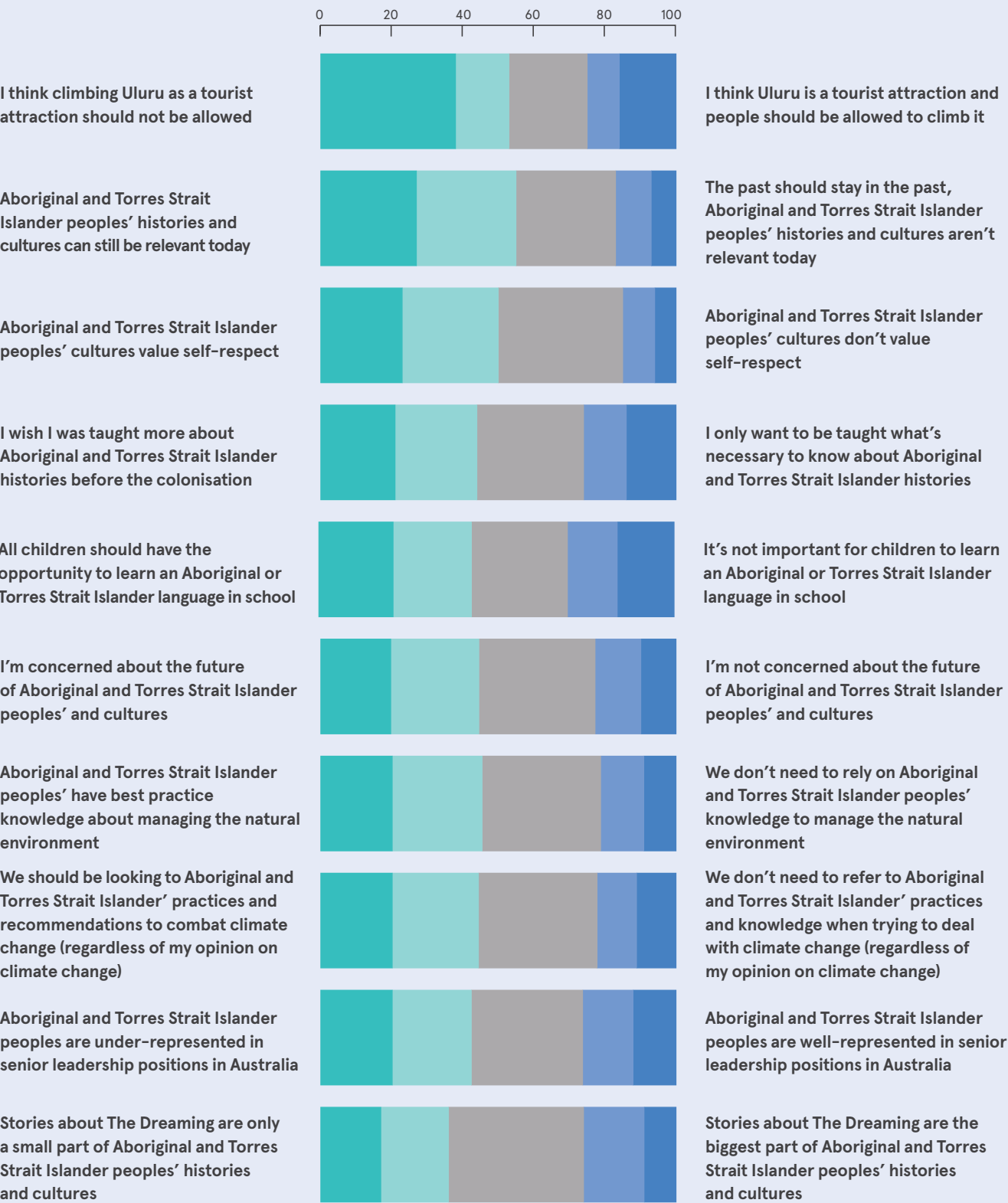
Fiftyfive5 ‘Always Will Be’ Community Sentiment Study. November 2023. Base: Australia population 18+ representative n= 2004. A13. How interested are you in learning more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ histories and cultures?

Attitudes about First Nations Peoples



Fiftyfive5 'Always Will Be' Community Sentiment Study. November 2023. Australia population 18+ representative n= 2004.
C1. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' and cultures in Australia?

Feelings about First Nations Peoples

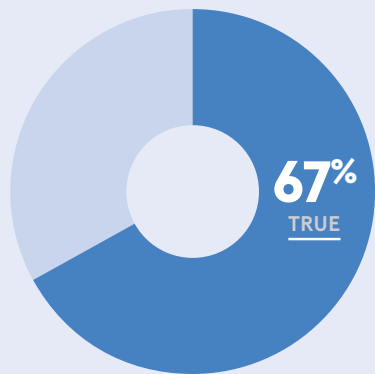


Fiftyfive5 'Always Will Be' Community Sentiment Study. November 2023. Base: Australia population 18+ representative n= 2004.
C2. Please select the response on the scale that best described how you personally feel about this statement?

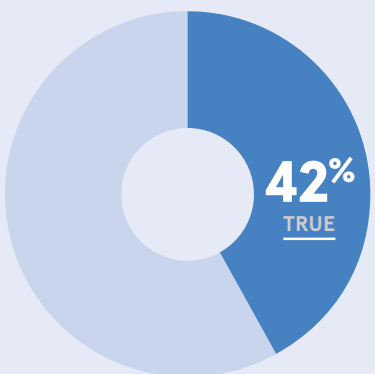
Statements Based on Outdated Stereotypes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Histories and Cultures

In this section, participants were shown a series of statements relating to Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and asked to indicate to the best of their knowledge whether the statements are true or false.

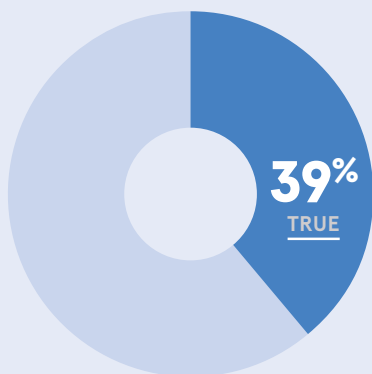
The highest proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples live in remote areas



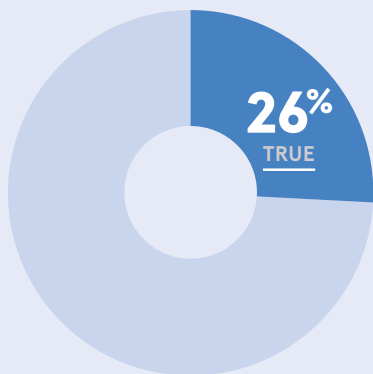
All Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples were nomads, rarely having a permanent settlement



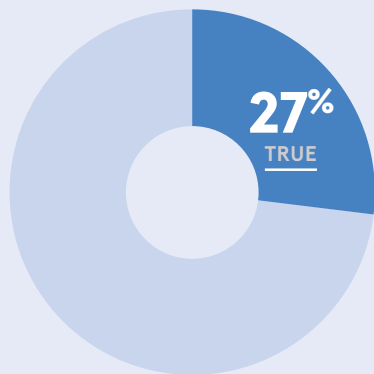
Mistreatment of women is an inherent part of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander culture



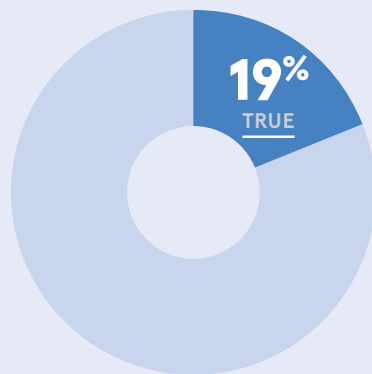
There was a race of people living in Australia before Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples



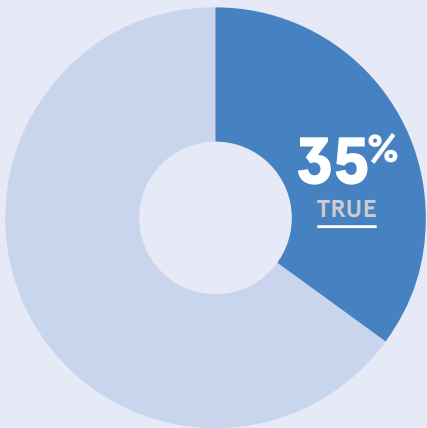
Australian land didn't belong to anyone when it was colonised by the British



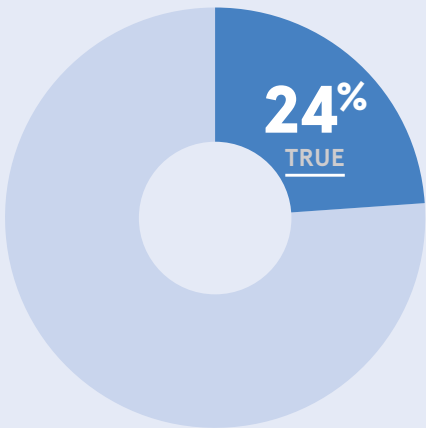
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples' cultures don't have a religious belief system



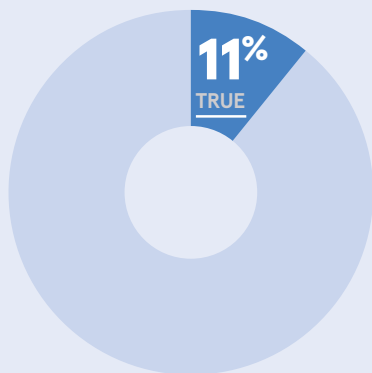
The Australian Constitution currently gives a Voice to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples



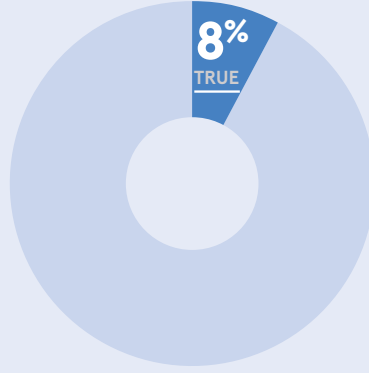
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples didn't actively resist the British invasion



There is a single Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander culture



There is a singular Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language in Australia



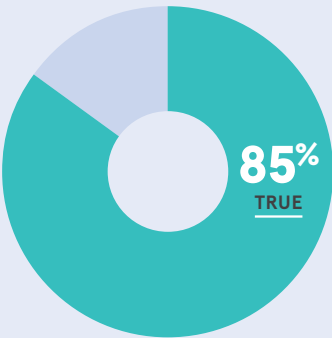
Fiftyfive5 'Always Will Be' Community Sentiment Study, November 2023. Australia population 18+ representative n= 2004. In this section we are going to show you a series of statements relating to Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We'd like you to indicate to the best of your knowledge whether the statements are true or false. B1, B2, B4, B6, B7, B9, B10, B12, B16

Fiftyfive5 'Always Will Be' Community Sentiment Study, November 2023. Australia population 18+ representative n= 2004. In this section we are going to show you a series of statements relating to Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We'd like you to indicate to the best of your knowledge whether the statements are true or false. B1, B2, B4, B6, B7, B9, B10, B12, B16

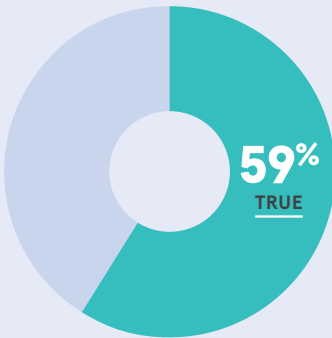
Accurate Statements about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ Histories and Cultures

In this section, participants were shown a series of statements relating to Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and asked to indicate to the best of their knowledge whether the statements are true or false.

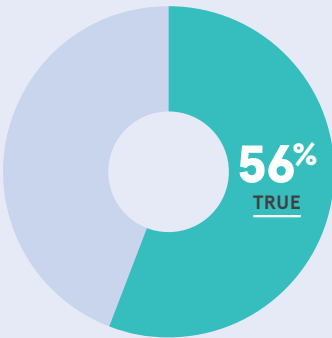
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ cultures are at least 50,000 years old



Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples’ histories and cultures have knowledge about how to combat climate change

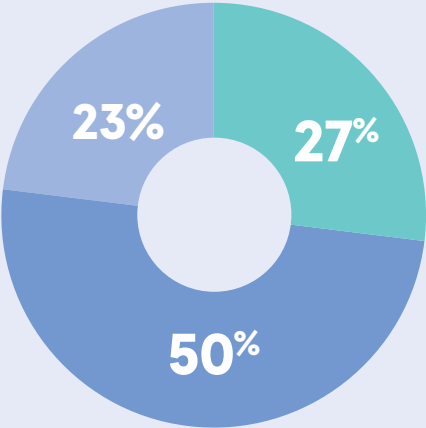


Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples used scientific knowledge and methods in the way they treated the natural environment



Fiftyfive5 ‘Always Will Be’ Community Sentiment Study. November 2023. Base: Australia population 18+ representative n= 2004. In this section we are going to show you a series of statements relating to Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We’d like you to indicate to the best of your knowledge whether the statements are true or false. B3, B8, B11, B13, B14, B15

Changing 26th January



Unsure if it should be changed No, should not be changed Yes, should be changed

‘Yes, should be changed’ answers among specific demographics:

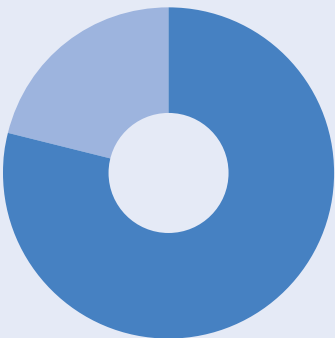
35%
OF 18–34YRS RESPONDENTS.

18%
OF 55YRS+ RESPONDENTS.

29%
OF RESPONDENTS IN MAJOR CITIES.

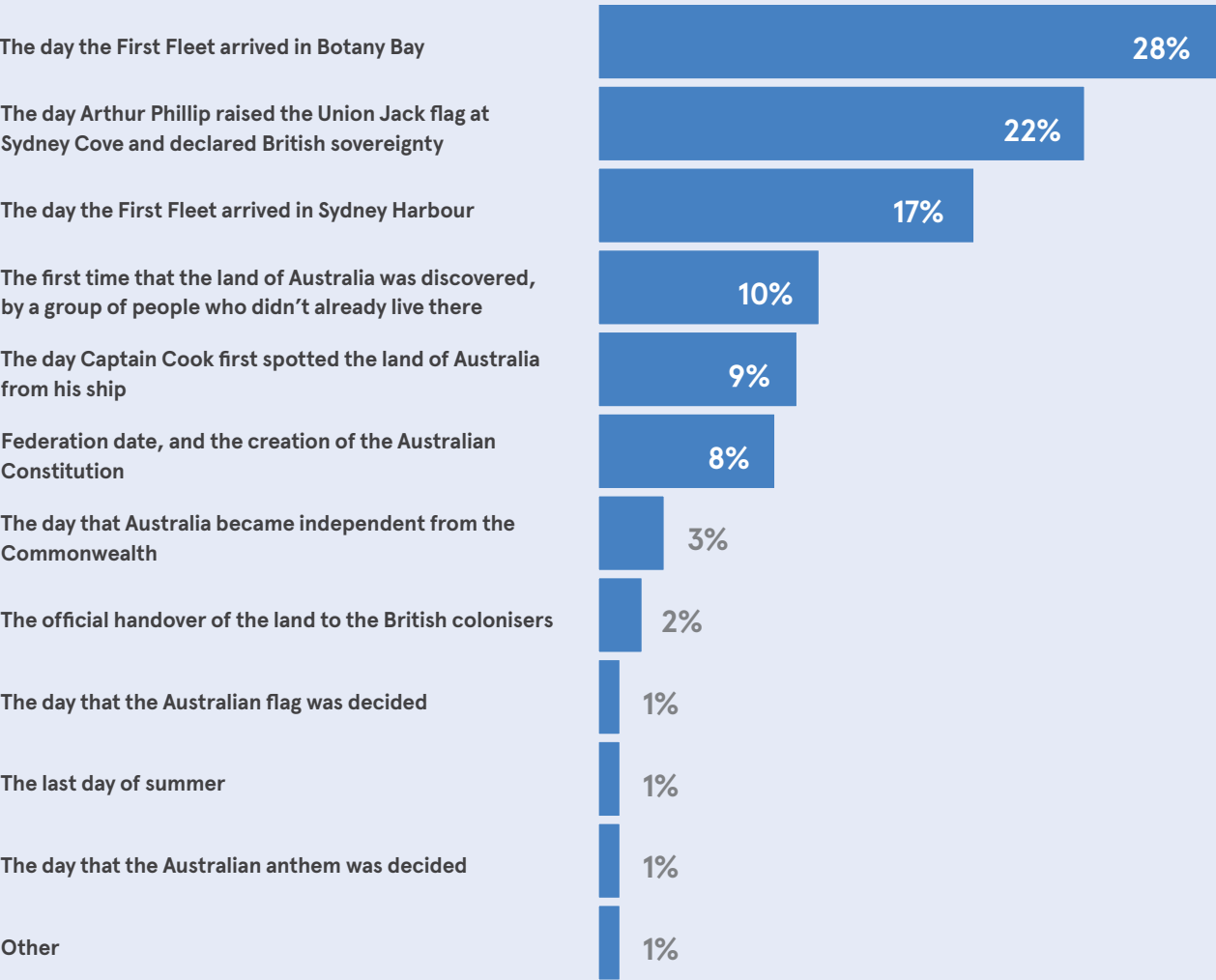
Fiftyfive5 ‘Always Will Be’ Community Sentiment Study. November 2023. Base: Claim to know reason for 26 January N=1608. B20. And do you believe the date for Australia Day should be changed from January 26th to another day?

Australian understanding of 26th January



79%
OF ALL RESPONDENTS CLAIM TO KNOW THE REASON WHY 26TH JANUARY WAS SELECTED AS THE NATIONAL HOLIDAY OF AUSTRALIA DAY.

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES



*Figures add to more than 100% as participants could choose more than one response.
Fiftyfive5 ‘Always Will Be’ Community Sentiment Study. November 2023. Base: Claim to know reason for 26 January N=1608. B18. I know the reason why the 26th January was selected as the national holiday of Australia Day. B19.What happened on the 26th January that we now represent it as the national holiday of Australia Day?

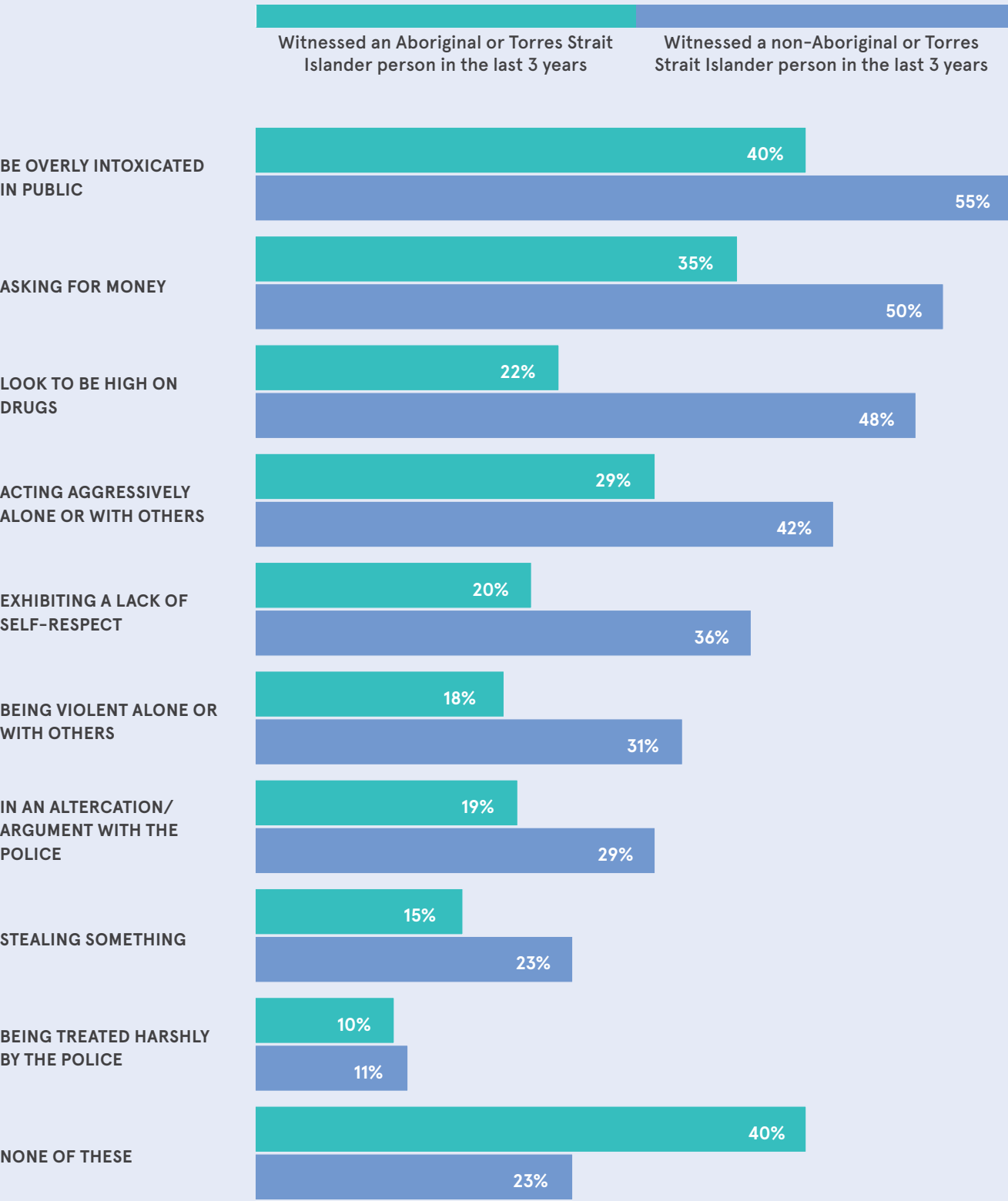
Perceptions of Behaviours



Almost 4 in 5 Australians believe that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are more likely to have a problem with alcohol and almost 2 in 3 believe they are more likely to be treated harshly by the police.

Fiftyfive5 'Always Will Be' Community Sentiment Study. November 2023. Australia population 18+ representative n= 2004. C4. Thinking about the differences between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' and Non-Indigenous Australians, how much do you agree with each of these statements?

Recall of Behaviours Witnessed



Fiftyfive5 'Always Will Be' Community Sentiment Study. November 2023. Base: Australia population 18+ representative n= 2004. C5. We want you to think about these behaviours in public. For the group of people described below, please indicate which activities you have personally witnessed someone engaging in over the last 3 years?

Essay: Understanding community sentiment to progress positive social change

Dr Mariko Smith

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Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Laws (University of Sydney); Graduate Diploma of Legal Practice (College of Law); Master of Museum Studies (University of Sydney); PhD (Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Sydney). Honorary Associate (School of Art, Communication and English, University of Sydney)

As a co-author of the AM's *The 2020 Project: First Nations Community Consultation Report* which directly informed the curatorial approach and content development for the *Unsettled* exhibition, I welcomed the opportunity to provide an analysis of the AM's latest exhibition consultation data.

Against the backdrop of Australian current affairs, especially in the post-14 October 2023 "Voice to Parliament" federal referendum socio-political landscape, this essay positions the museum as a key institution capable of producing and applying impactful sociological research during this pivotal period for contemporary Australian society.

Background

The 2020 Project report and the resulting *Unsettled* exhibition provided a comprehensive blueprint for the Australian Museum in terms of designing and conducting front-end audience evaluation research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members to generate ideas and curatorial direction.¹ By ensuring that report is freely accessible to download via the AM's website,² organisations and communities have also been able to learn from this information and apply the findings in their respective activities to strategically reach First Nations stakeholders.

Now that the AM is embarking on a new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander permanent exhibition and given the successful reception of *Unsettled* by visitors and the broader public as well as industry recognition, it made sense to utilise the same evaluative and collaborative methodology again and produce another informative public report into key findings.

This Exhibition will follow best standards of First Nations curatorial practice by incorporating the feedback of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples collected in the AM's 2023–2024 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Consultation Survey, as detailed in the dataset summaries on pages 8–29 of this Report.

However, the Museum also needs to reach non-Indigenous visitors to ensure that they too can meaningfully engage with the curatorial content, objects, and information within a First Nations exhibition. Therefore, a separate targeted Australian public survey (**2023 Community Sentiment Study**) was also undertaken by the AM, to add another rich source of data for the First Nations Curatorial Team's consideration alongside the 2023–2024 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Consultation Survey data. This additional survey aimed to identify and measure broader community sentiments around First Nations-related topics of conversations; representation; perceptions; stereotyping; myth-busting; and finding out people's levels of knowledge as well as preferred sources of authority for gaining knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, histories, and cultures.

The availability of such data is arguably limited in Australia,³ with museums not typically being a source for this sociological information. Yet museums as sites for social activity and connection essentially reflect the society in which they are an active participant from the date of their establishment, so their standpoint is also important to include.⁴ Also, what we know as the "Australian public" has evolved in its demographical make-up over the course of Australia's colonial history up to the present time.⁵ Accordingly, there is increasing public expectation for museums to be responsive to the needs and interests of an ever-changing, as well as an ever-expanding, audience base to remain relevant in contemporary society.⁶

Why should museums be a part of this conversation?

As a type of collecting institution, museums possess not only collections of objects and associated information, but also a significantly influential platform to produce and contribute knowledge and discourse about what their staff and agents acting on their behalf collected and interpreted during their professional activities. As Laura McBride and I described on a label shown in the *Unsettled* exhibition, '[w]hen objects enter museums, they can become decontextualised and given new meanings according to Western scientific classification systems'.⁷

In an opinion piece penned for First Nations media company, IndigenousX in 2019, which was published in *The Guardian (Australia)*, I wrote about how many museums participated in what is now acknowledged as scientific racism:⁸

They are institutions which have been complicit in facilitating the collection of “specimens” (Indigenous bodies and material culture) for empirical evidence that has been used to define and categorise human beings into a hierarchy of superiority and justify discrimination based on “race”. Researchers accessed these collections to study and publish papers, which further perpetuated myths about Indigenous “inferiority” under the “objective” authority of knowledge and science.

This supports the views of many First Nations peoples and allies that museums should demonstrate leadership in accepting responsibility for, and actively addressing, the social issues that have resulted from their traditional functions and processes.

The AM’s data has the real potential to redefine the role of museums in Australian society, transforming museum practices and standing in the community. This can be achieved through generating and using high quality evidence-based data to raise awareness of important social issues such as race relations; racism; racial bias; stakeholder and audience interests and needs; education levels; and gaps in information to inform contemporary museum operations.⁹ This can support the Museum in explaining why it is appropriately well-placed in contemporary Australian society to participate in such advocacy work to promote greater social cohesion, as an extension of its institutional social responsibility.¹⁰

In particular, the data can help answer some pertinent questions for Australian society such as:

- 1. What is the pathway forward for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians in a post-14 October 2023 federal referendum for a “Voice to Parliament” (**the Voice; 2023 Referendum**)?
- 2. How can Australians meaningfully recognise and address societal issues, particularly racism and racial bias which are notably prevalent in Australian society and specifically affects non-white Australians¹¹ including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples?
- 3. How can better social cohesion, including the element of racial literacy,¹² be achieved in Australia especially in current challenging social, political, and economic conditions which increasingly contribute to ignorance, prejudice, polarisation, and division in society?¹³
- 4. In particular – what can museums, as institutions serving the public which are seen as trusted authorities of information and knowledge in similar ways to schools and media, do regarding the above lines of inquiry in relation to its engagements with First Nations peoples, histories, and cultures?

My analysis of the AM’s data for this Report will demonstrate the far-reaching impact of this information beyond the development of this new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Exhibition at the Australian Museum. I draw comparisons with similar information and trends from several relevant scholarly reports, current affairs articles, and commentary pieces about community sentiments on reconciliation, definitions of racism and anti-racism, social cohesion, truth-telling and historical acceptance initiatives published in recent years.

Why is the present a critical juncture for First Nations peoples and Australian society?

Around the time of writing this essay, Australians had marked the first anniversary of the unsuccessful 2023 Referendum result.¹⁴ It is also worth noting that the AM’s 2023–2024 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Consultation Survey and the 2023 Community Sentiment Study respectively, were active during the lead-up and aftermath of the 2023 Referendum.

The 2023 Referendum appeared to have faltered on the vision of what a “reconciled” Australia looks like.¹⁵ The immediate outcome clearly showed such a stark divergence on what everyone thought this should be – is it about reflecting multiculturalism, celebrating diversity, achieving racial equality or equity, focusing on inclusivity and harmony, or even aiming for the idealism of an “aracial” or “post-racial”

society in which racial discrimination and prejudice no longer exist? Another way to look at this situation is through power dynamics¹⁶ – the issue may drill down to how much power in decision-making and socio-economic outcomes are Australians willing to share with First Nations; challenging the current status quo may not feel to some as worth exhausting the supply of this political capital.

There has been countless reflections, conversations, and public commentary on the aftermath and ongoing impacts of the result.¹⁷ Individuals experienced a range of emotions and opinions from disbelief, disillusionment, hopelessness, losing trust in others (“Every time I saw someone I would wonder, how did they vote?”), to encountering intolerance and dehumanising attitudes. Within weeks after the 2023 Referendum, an Aboriginal staff member at the Museum received a message to their personal social media account from a stranger who wrote, ‘nobody cares any more. You lost the referendum and youre STILL talking about voices. Lets see how that works out for you [sic]’ and ‘youve driven people from being supportive of the cause to absolute hatred [sic]’.¹⁸

It is little wonder that some people now feel that the conditions for achieving true reconciliation in Australia have become increasingly untenable and seemingly futile. Considering Reconciliation Australia’s five-part definition of their vision of reconciliation (race relations, equality and equity, institutional integrity, unity, and historical acceptance),¹⁹ Australians are not likely to make much progress in reaching this goal without committing fully to a whole-of-society approach based on basic principles of respect and trust in order to improve relationships, close the gap in Indigenous life outcomes, support First Nations self-determination across the community, value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures with pride, and learn from the lessons of the past as part of the healing process.

Current affairs across the world in recent years have highlighted racism and discrimination as threats to social harmony. Strategies to meaningfully address these issues have had mixed rates of success. Nevertheless, it is important to continue efforts to achieve positive social change, as advocated in research reports.

For instance, the *An Anti-Racism Framework: Voices of First Nations Peoples* report was released in late 2024. This report encouraged ‘a concerted effort to reform systems, educate individuals, and ensure meaningful representation and accountability for First Nations peoples’,²⁰ and that through

‘collective effort and sustained action, Australia can move forward towards a future where racism is no longer a barrier to equity and justice’.²¹ This approach could provide a bridge between the seemingly abstract ideal of social harmony and the practical objective of eliminating racial discrimination in society through targeted action.

There is, however, growing concern that government, industry, and the general public will lose the appetite and motivation to support Indigenous issues following the 2023 Referendum, which will erode into previous reconciliatory accomplishments and not bode well for prospects of future progress. I am reminded of the adage, “don’t throw the baby out with the bathwater”, with the prospect of inaction, inertia, apathy, or outright rejection from leaders in turn sending a particular message to the public.²² Even though the 2023 Referendum question was very specifically tied to legally changing the Australian Constitution, the “No” result may well be presently interpreted as a mandate to disregard Indigenous issues going forward (“I thought we voted ‘no’ to all that stuff”).

There have already been several concerning developments. For instance, the Liberal National Party of Queensland withdrew its support for state-based treaty negotiations and truth-telling process in part due to the high “No” vote.²³ Also, the Northern Territory (**NT**) Government has also abruptly stopped its own treaty process. According to ANTaR (Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation), it ‘formally began in 2018, was all but abandoned in 2022, revived in early 2024 and then formally dismantled by the NT’s recently elected Country Liberal government in February 2025, seven years after it was first announced’.²⁴ Federally, the National Agreement on Closing the Gap’s February 2025 update has indicated that only five of the nineteen targets are on track to be met by 2031.²⁵

The Ipsos Issues Monitor, which is an ongoing quantitative survey of Australian views about local, state, territory, and national issues, released survey data (collected in late April 2024) during National Reconciliation Week in May 2024 that revealed interest in national Indigenous issues was at the ‘lowest level since 2021’, with ‘Australians less supportive of Closing the Gap initiatives, and changing [the] Australia Day date still unpopular’.²⁶ It also reported mixed reviews and opinions from Australians since the failed referendum as to what degree the government’s roles in acting for First Nations peoples’ interests should be, whether it is more, less, or about the same.

Ipsos Australia Public Affairs Associate Research Director, Nonie Finlayson stated, ‘it’s clear that more needs to be done to eliminate racism and determine what level of government action is appropriate to support Indigenous issues’.²⁷ Especially telling is Finlayson’s extended quote:

Australians’ knowledge and attitudes towards First Nations’ peoples appear to have stalled in the shadow of the 2023 Voice to Parliament vote. The Indigenous Issues report comes amid a time of turbulence in Australian Indigenous affairs. Many people are feeling significant fatigue post the divisive Voice to Parliament campaign and are also feeling deflated after the vote’s rejection. The debate surrounding the Voice appears to have caused long-term damage to interest in and support for Indigenous issues, particularly around consensus on important closing-the-gap initiatives.

What can museums do at this crucial time?

I anticipate that such developments place a spotlight on other institutions in society like museums to step in and make the effort to better educate and actively engage the public with First Nations peoples, histories, and cultures in order to promote reconciliatory action – especially if other institutions decide to draw back.²⁸ There will need to be a process for institutions and organisations to reconsider how they can serve First Nations communities and their needs at this point of time.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have felt that they have been at a crossroads on how to move forward. Isabelle Higgins, a Torres Strait Islander woman and ABC journalist was quoted in an article published soon after the eventful 2023 Referendum date with a sobering message to Australians:²⁹

When we’re talking about reconciliation, we use kind language, we’re generous, we extend the hand of friendship, we invite people in to share our culture. This failing, this being rejected, so categorically by all Australians, it will change the way Indigenous Australians want to interact with the rest of the country.

In my March 2024 GLAMSLAM keynote to the Sydney-based galleries, libraries, archives, and museums (GLAM) sector, I suggested that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members will certainly continue to expect more from cultural institutions’ First Nations offerings.³⁰ The “asks” from communities will likely become more extensive. Staff may then feel caught in the middle and feel challenged in their ability to “thread the needle” between the aspirations of an activated First Nations community, supportive allies

outside of the Indigenous community wanting to continue channeling positive energy from the “Yes” campaign, alongside others across sectors and society who now appear more wary about supporting anything Indigenous-related.

But museums can be a suitable place for promoting positive and constructive attitudes about First Nations peoples and cultures, with visitors responding with interest to creative and innovative onsite activations with First Nations staff and cultural practitioners. The AM’s 2023 temporary exhibition titled, *Her Name is Nanny Nellie*³¹ – based on subject matter from the SBS/NITV documentary feature film of the same name – won a 2024 national AMaGA Community Connection Award for ‘connecting diverse audiences through various formats’ and serving ‘as a powerful example of how institutions can embrace First Peoples leadership and truth-telling with clarity and warmth’.³²

Unsettled remains a strong curatorial project example of a First Nations exhibition³³ which reaches out and resonates across community stakeholder and visitor demographics; no easy feat considering the demographic diversity and divergence of views between these groups. In late 2021, while this exhibition was still open, the AM commissioned marketing agency, FiftyFive5 to conduct exit surveys with visitors to measure their experiences across the Museum’s offerings at the time, including a ‘special exhibition deep-dive’ into this temporary exhibition.³⁴

Of the 762 interviews that took place, 92% of respondents agreed that *Unsettled* informed their understanding about First Nations cultures and Australian history. The exhibition had increased their recognition and understanding of historical topics like invasions, wars, massacres; the misreporting of historical events; and the ongoing impacts of colonisation.³⁵ Advocates for historical acceptance and truth-telling agree that a shared understanding of Australian history between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians can promote better race relations.³⁶

When asked ‘What did you learn at this exhibition’, the main takeaway for respondents was the re-telling and reframing of key moments in Australia’s history, in particular, how this differs from what is learnt at school.³⁷ This showed how museums could play a key role in enabling the public’s engagement with truth-telling to help fill in education gaps. In Anne Maree Payne and Heidi Norman’s 2024 study, *Coming to terms with the past?*:³⁸

[The authors’] exploration of attitudes towards, barriers to and enablers of truth-telling in Australia highlighted

that while truth-telling is an everyday activity for many First Nations people, non-Indigenous Australians are unsure about how to participate and unclear about what their role in truth-telling might be.

Engaged visitors were able to collect an *Unsettled* exhibition postcard with a suggested list of actions. It covered a range of activities encouraging acknowledgment of Indigenous sovereignty; listening to First Nations peoples; reflecting on one’s own beliefs and assumptions; questioning what one hears or learns about First Nations peoples; acting by challenging a range of negative behaviour; and supporting AM First Nations programs.

In reference to Payne and Norman’s quote above, this postcard takeaway listing practical actions would be considered a highly effective method to help meet needs for truth-telling participation opportunities.³⁹ *Unsettled* reportedly inspired a range of actions from visitors, including recommending the exhibition; acknowledging, respecting and reflecting on the content.⁴⁰ 92% of the respondents reported that they will take at least one action because of seeing this exhibition (96% of adults and 75% of families).

FiftyFive5’s report on the *Unsettled* exhibition deep-dive exit survey concluded that:⁴¹

The Australian Museum is seen as a strong advocate for First Nations cultures among Cultural Institution visitors, there is a way to go for First Nations peoples to view the Museum in the same way. Partly because, past wrongs and views on historical events are still polarising among non-Indigenous audiences – particularly amongst young adults vs retirees.

However, many visitors believe we should be celebrating First Nations cultures and driving the conversation forward positively into the future.

How can [its] exhibitions and access to content help guide visitors to improve the future for First Nations people & culture and recognise past wrongs?

‘As First Nations peoples, how we are represented is how we are perceived by the public, and every day our people mitigate false and negative stereotypes’.

So, what has the community sentiment data told us?

FiftyFive5 was engaged by the Australian Museum to conduct the 2023 Community Sentiment Study, with a key objective to understand current approaches to teaching First Nations peoples’ histories and cultures (inside and outside of school settings).⁴² The AM was mindful of the potential influence of the Voice debate on responses, so FiftyFive5’s fieldwork was delayed to November 2023, three weeks after the referendum.

Even though race relations-related incidents were already reaching a high level in the lead-up to the 2023 Referendum,⁴³ there has been a marked increase of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples facing abusive behaviour with racist elements since that date, leading to a view that the successful “No” result has effectively given people carte blanche to openly voice certain thoughts of a discriminatory nature and offensive effect which social norms would ordinarily keep in check.⁴⁴

Since race today is considered a social construction rather than a scientific concept, it is critical to understand it within a conceptual framework focused on social systems, to recognise that it forms a key element in systems promoting oppression and privilege of particular racial groups.⁴⁵ Racial bias as well as racism is undermining social cohesion in Australia.⁴⁶ While racism involves holding a belief that a race can be inherently superior or inferior to another race, racial bias refers to a tendency seemingly ingrained into society’s collective unconscious to think and behave in a prejudicial way towards others based on their appearance or background.⁴⁷ This is manifested in certain negative associations and stereotyping which effectively disregards individuality and objectivity.

Laura McBride summed it up well in one of our *Unsettled*-related curatorial essays: ‘[a]s First Nations peoples, how we are represented is how we are perceived by the public, and every day our people mitigate false and negative stereotypes’.⁴⁸ This involves a significant cultural load, constrains mobility in society to take up opportunities and benefit socio-economically. One of our *Unsettled* text

panels referred to a 2019 study which found that three out of four Australians hold an implicit bias against First Nations peoples.⁴⁹ Therefore, Laura McBride and Courtney Marsh included a section in the brief to FiftyFive5 for the 2023 Community Sentiment Study to test statements based on outdated stereotypes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, histories, and cultures on respondents. These are arguably under-studied forms of racism, where studies had often focused on more direct, interpersonal types rather than more subtle forms which have structural roots.⁵⁰

From reading pages 46–49 of this 2025 Consultation Report, it is evident that misconceptions are a deeply embedded and widespread issue in our society. For instance:

- 26% of respondents believe that there was a race of people living in Australia before Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (commonly referred to erroneously as a “pygmy” race). This is despite credible academic research debunking this myth, including in an AM web article.⁵¹
- Almost 4 in 5 (79%) of Australians claim to know the reason for 26th January. Only 22% of those respondents were correct. This indicated a high level of misplaced confidence in knowledge of this Country’s history.
- 24% of Australians believe First Nations peoples didn’t actively resist British invasion. Interestingly, this number decreases to 19% amongst the 18–34 age group, potentially indicating a change in education on this topic.

These misconceptions are further reflected by Australians’ understanding of the 2023 Referendum. Despite the close proximity between the referendum and the survey, 35% of respondents to the survey believed the following statement to be true – that “[t]he Australian Constitution currently gives a voice to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples”. It does beg the question about what does the above finding say regarding the level of education in the campaigns leading up to the 2023 Referendum vote? Perhaps people were led to believe that there was already a mechanism in place so that there was no need to vote “yes”. This was not the only interesting development noted in this data set; it also gave some context to why the AM decided to pursue this line of inquiry.

Most tellingly, Australians believed a range of negative stereotypes regarding substance abuse and committing violent/anti-social behaviours, even though they also responded that in the last three years they were more likely

to have witnessed non-Indigenous people engaging in such behaviours than witnessing an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person engaging in the same behaviours.

In fact, 40% of respondents reported that they had not witnessed Indigenous peoples engaged in any of the nine negative behaviours listed compared to 23% stating they had not witnessed a non-Indigenous person engage in any of the behaviours.

Preliminary interpretation of the community sentiment data highlighted the tensions between accommodating different audience groups, and further insights would be gained from analysing specific gender, age, location, and other demographical data. For instance, almost 3 in 10 Australians (29%) believed too much attention has been paid to race issues in Australia, with a significantly higher proportion (36%) believing that too much attention has been paid to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues – no doubt influenced by the high profile of Indigenous topics during the Voice debate. Within this figure there was a trend for men (42%), people aged 65 years-plus (45%), and those living in outer and remote areas (51%) to more likely believe this. More studies are needed to corroborate data, but Ben et al. noted in their 2024 journal article “Racism Data in Australia: A Review of Quantitative Studies and Directions for Future Research” that ‘there is some evidence that males and older people may be more likely to hold racist views’.⁵²

The 2023 Community Sentiment Study recorded around 1 in 2 Australians (51%) had visited a cultural institution in the past 12 months, although almost 1 in 3 (31%) further indicated that they were unlikely to visit an exhibit relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Within this figure this included significant percentages of people aged 55 years-plus (37%); people living in regional, outer or remote regions (39%); and particularly in South Australia and Northern Territory (41%).

Just over 1 in 5 Australians (22%) indicated that they were concerned over Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights, which was similar to the proportion of those concerned about the loss of jobs (22%). Cost of living and housing affordability pressures was by far the dominant concern (85%), and this was highly comparable with other datasets collected in recent times⁵³ – the 2023 *Mapping Social Cohesion* study commissioned by the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute found that the economy is currently the number one concern for many people and financial pressures ‘are weighing heavily on social cohesion’.⁵⁴ Polity Research & Consulting’s 2022 Reconciliation Barometer

Survey full report, commissioned by Reconciliation Australia, noted that economic concerns are trumping those about reconciliation.⁵⁵

The *Mapping Social Cohesion* study report also referred to economic inequality and Australia being the land of the “fair go”. I consider the latter phrase to be a loaded concept. It has been articulated in a post-2023 Referendum media article by an interviewee as ‘[e]veryone can get a fair go – black, white or brindle, you can have a crack’.⁵⁶ This phrase is often evoked to counteract the argument that there is a need for special rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples such as a Voice or other equalising measures by simplistically claiming that all Australians already share the right and access to respect and equality. Federal Country Liberal Party senator, Jacinta Nampijinpa Price has also referred to everyone having a “fair go” as part of what it means to be Australian, alluding more so to the basis of need and opportunity rather than racial heritage.⁵⁷ This kind of reasoning effectively glosses over ‘entrenched differences of opportunity and power in Australian society’ particularly between First Nations peoples and non-Indigenous Australians.⁵⁸

The 2023 Community Sentiment Study also indicated a difficulty in engaging culturally and linguistically diverse (**CALD**) communities about First Nations issues. People who mainly speak a language other than English were significantly less concerned about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights. Ben et al. noted in their research of racism data that ‘Australian-born and non-English speaking migrants had higher prejudice towards Indigenous people than English-speaking migrants’.⁵⁹ As someone who has a parent from overseas (Japan), as well as an Aboriginal parent (Yuin Nation), these are relevant findings to me personally. In early 2024, I was interviewed by a SBS Japanese program journalist on the topic of understanding cultural diversity among Indigenous peoples and shared my insights about dealing with assumptions some people made about my Asian and Aboriginal heritage and the appearance-based racism I had experienced which is informed by stereotypes and narrow perceptions about Aboriginal people.⁶⁰ I do believe it is about making informative resources readily available and increasing opportunities to learn directly from First Nations peoples to inspire meaningful interactions for migrant backgrounds and tourists.⁶¹

The 2023 *Mapping Social Cohesion* study summed up that Australians’ social cohesion ‘is under pressure and declining on some fronts [with] sense of national pride and belonging ...

declining for some years, [and] discrimination and prejudice remain stubbornly common’.⁶² Interviews with migrant community representatives after the 2023 Referendum indicated a sense of disconnection to Indigenous issues and feeling like they are not “true Australians”, arguably leading to a zero-sum game scenario.⁶³ Additionally, often migrant community members have limited to no direct contact experience with Aboriginal people, so they are susceptible to learning from racist tropes and stereotypes.⁶⁴

This is a good reason to produce good quality content at the Museum for CALD background visitors about First Nations peoples, histories, and cultures so that they do not have to rely on limited or inappropriate sources of information. Fostering an inclusive, harmonising attitude to everyone belonging in the Australian community is important, as well as weaving together a shared national identity based on a multicultural story. However it is critical for them also to learn how to recognise and understand the various types of discrimination that First Nations peoples experience in Australia and critically think about how this relates to the current status quo in Australia.

During the 2023 Community Sentiment survey, the knowledge base of respondents and finding out where they have accessed information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, histories, and cultures provided telling insight which will help the Museum to strategically tailor its outreach to the public. Just over 1 in 3 Australians claimed to know at least a fair bit about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ histories and cultures, but this dropped down to 1 in 5 when asked about their local area. Understanding local Aboriginal communities’ Ancestral connections to Country where you reside is an important starting point to better relating to “bigger picture” Indigenous concepts, topics, and issues.

Almost 1 in 4 Australians claimed that it is their own lack of knowledge which presents a major barrier to engaging more deeply with First Nations peoples, histories, and cultures. Clearly the work is cut out for collecting and knowledge institutions regarding addressing the general knowledge gap: the 2022 Reconciliation Barometer report indicated that whilst 84% of its respondents believe that knowing about First Nations histories is very important, only 45% of respondents stated that they hold a high or very high knowledge level of First Nations histories.⁶⁵ FiftyFive5 found that the level of interest in the last three years either hadn’t changed (62%) or actually increased (22%), compared to only 16% of respondents saying their interest had decreased.

Source of knowledge appeared significantly influenced by age. Generational difference is a key factor, showing the need for tailored education and engagement strategies across age groups. While primary and high school were identified as the two most common places where Australians obtained some kind of education about First Nations peoples, histories, and cultures (net 33%), these had been rated by respondents as the least useful – and no doubt, the era in which one had received their education would influence the level of useful, and indeed (in)appropriate, information being taught.

Specifically, men and older Australians cited the most challenges to learning. Younger Australians demonstrated more openness and initiative but require more guidance on how to do this. As mentioned above, older generations’ (and particularly men) tendencies to hold prejudicial views about Indigenous peoples would explain why stereotypes and factual misrepresentations still hold considerable sway in some age groups and form a basis of excuses for not supporting First Nations peoples and causes.

Reporting about having other things on their mind (31%) and media distrust (24%) were identified by a number of respondents as key challenges to learning about First Nations peoples’ histories and cultures, while social reasons tended to be a less common challenge. Interestingly, visiting a cultural institution was nominated in the 2023 Community Sentiment Study as the one of the top sources for gaining knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ histories and cultures (31%), second only to the news (48%). 39% of respondents aged 75 years-plus nominated history books.

The high status of the news is quite significant considering that respondents had also indicated a level of distrust or skepticism of media sources. It is well-known that the quality and quantity of Australian media reporting on Indigenous peoples and issues in Australia can vary significantly depending on a range of factors including partisanship, sensationalist angles and agendas on reporting strategies. This is where increasing people’s awareness, understanding, and indeed critical thinking about race, racism, and racial bias is essential in Australian society, and this would require an accountable “whole-of-society” approach to promote an anti-racism outlook.⁶⁶

Final remarks

The 2023–2024 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Consultation Survey and the 2023 Community Sentiment Study findings provide clear guidance to the Australian Museum on how to engage with different demographics of audience members, identify gaps in knowledge regarding First Nations peoples, and provide local histories as well as national stories. We have ascertained from the data the level of public trust in museums, as well as the degree to which the public looks to these institutions to dispel falsehoods.

In particular, the 2023 Community Sentiment Study illustrated the primary false and negative stereotypes that it can address regarding Aboriginal people, histories and cultures. The First Nations Curatorial Team can include the antithesis to these misrepresentations to teach truthfully in museums and to help visitors strengthen their critical thinking skills.

The analysis presented in this essay supports the argument that museums, with their influential platform and authoritative voice, can demonstrate leadership in addressing the social issues they are historically responsible for. This would promote true reconciliation in action, through undergoing processes of reflection and truth-telling, which will help usher in a more inclusive and equitable Australia.⁶⁷

Dr Mariko Smith.

¹ McBride, L. and Smith, M. (2019). *The 2020 Project: First Nations Community Consultation Report 2019*. Report on the findings of national community consultations, commissioned by the Australian Museum Trust. https://media.australian.museum/media/dd/documents/2020_report_web_version_spreads_lr.abef674.pdf; Australian Museum (2021). *Unsettled* exhibition. Exhibition webpage on the Australia Museum’s website. <https://australian.museum/learn/first-nations/unsettled/>

² McBride, L. (2021). *The 2020 Project First Nations Community Consultation Report*, Australian Museum webpage. <https://australian.museum/learn/cultures/the-2020-project/>

³ See Ben, J., Elias, A., Sharples, R., Dunn, K., Truong, M., Mansouri, F., Paradies, Y. (2023). Racism Data in Australia: A Review of Quantitative Studies and Directions for Future Research. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 45(2), 228–257: 242, 244.

⁴ See readings about sociology and museums, for instance: Eisenbeis, M. (1972). Elements for a sociology of museums. *Museum*. XXIV, 2, 110–119; Fyfe, G. and Jones, P. (2017). Introduction: Sociology and Museums: Visitors, Policy, Knowledge. *Museum and Society*, 14, 10.29311/mas.v14i1.622.

⁵ See for example: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2000). Population characteristics: 20th century: beginning to end. *4102.0 – Australian Social Trends*. <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/7d12b0f6763c78caca257061001cc588/DB7193812E1EFC92CA2570EC000E215A?opendocument>

⁶ See Carlsson, R. (2024, 15 September). Why We Need Museums Now More Than Ever – The Importance of Museums. *MuseumsNext*, web article. <https://www.museumnext.com/article/why-we-need-museums-now-more-than-ever/>

⁷ McBride, L. and Smith, M. (2021). *Unsettled*. Exhibition catalogue. Australian Museum Trust, Sydney NSW, 148.

⁸ Smith, M. (2019). Museums should become known as sites of cultural revival, not scientific racism. *The Guardian (Australia)*. Opinion piece as part of an IndigenousX and *The Guardian (Australia)* partnership. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/oct/31/museums-should-become-known-as-sites-of-cultural-revival-not-scientific-racism>. See also my interview with Auntie Irene Ridgeway in the First Person Films (2023). *Her Name is Nanny Nellie*. 79 minute full-feature SBS/NITV documentary. <https://www.sbs.com.au/ondemand/movie/her-name-is-nanny-nellie/2300137539512>. For a general overview on race and science, see: Rutherford, A. (2020). *How to Argue With a Racist: History, Science, Race and Reality*. Orion: London, UK.

⁹ I was inspired by the study documented in Ben et al., Racism Data in Australia, 244.

¹⁰ The concept of anti-racist/racism and anti-discrimination curatorial practice is one that deserves further attention in the Australian context: see overseas precedents such as Bayer, N., Kazeem-Kamiński, B., Sternfeld, N. (2018). *Curating As Anti-Racist Practice*. Department of Art. Aalto University, Helsinki; The Inclusive Historian’s Handbook (2020, 23 December). *View from the Field: Equity-Oriented and Anti-Racist Curatorial Practice*. <https://inclusivehistorian.com/view-from-the-field-equity-oriented-and-anti-racist-curatorial-practice/>

¹¹ Regarding the term “white” being in lowercase, see guidance in The Associated Press (2020, 20 July). Why we will lowercase white. *The Definitive Source – Announcements*. <https://www.ap.org/the-definitive-source/announcements/why-we-will-lowercase-white/>

¹² Reconciliation NSW (undated). Racial Literacy. *Anti Racism Education Toolkit* factsheet. <https://reconciliationnsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Racial-Literacy.pdf>

¹³ See McKinnon Poll (2024). *Partisanship, polarisation and social cohesion in Australia*. Report on the findings of national research survey, commissioned by the Susan McKinnon Foundation. https://www.susanmckinnon.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/J01216_SMF_Partisanship_and_Polarisation-Report-FINAL.pdf

¹⁴ See official results information in Australian Electoral Commission (updated 10 May 2024). *2023 federal referendum*. <https://www.aec.gov.au/Elections/referendums/2023.htm>

¹⁵ Smith, M. (2024). *Our ears (and hearts) “on the ground”*: *Post-referendum, where to now? Lessons for GLAM*. Keynote presentation at 2024 GLAMSLAM event [unpublished], Australian National Maritime Museum, Darling Harbour, NSW, 15 March 2024.

¹⁶ See Pillow, M. and Gay, R. (2024). *Do The Work: A guide to understanding power and creating change*. Leaping Hare Press: London, UK.

¹⁷ Including commentary pieces such as Jash, T., Michelmores, K., and Williams, C. (2024, 13 October). Life after the Voice referendum: Australians weigh up the path ahead. *ABC News*. Australian Broadcasting Corporation. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-10-13/voice-to-parliament-referendum-anniversary-one-year-on/104444862>

¹⁸ Smith, *Our ears (and hearts) “on the ground.”*; Foley, S., Gibbs-Muir, J., Scully, J. (2024, 12 July). Racism still rife, but NAIDOC Week a time for positivity, say leaders as they look to the future with hope. *ABC News*. Australian Broadcasting Corporation. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-07-12/elders-reflect-on-racism-after-no-vote-naidoc-week/104070888>

¹⁹ Reconciliation Australia (undated). *What is reconciliation?* <https://www.reconciliation.org.au/reconciliation/what-is-reconciliation/#::-:text=At%20its%20heart%2C%20reconciliation%20is,the%20benefit%20of%20all%20Australians>.

²⁰ First Nations Co. (2024). *An Anti-Racism Framework: Voices of First Nations Peoples*. Report on the national community consultations, commissioned by the Australian Human Rights Commission. Canberra, ACT: Federation of Ethnic Communities’ Councils of Australia. <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/race-discrimination/publications/anti-racism-framework-voices-first-nations-peoples>, 12.

²¹ First Nations Co., *An Anti-Racism Framework: Voices of First Nations Peoples*, 14.

²² Smith, *Our ears (and hearts) “on the ground.”*

²³ Stanford, B. (2024, 15 October). The federal government has left Indigenous Treaties to the states. How are they progressing? *The Conversation (Australia)*. <https://theconversation.com/the-federal-government-has-left-indigenous-treaties-to-the-states-how-are-they-progressing-240552>; and Queensland State Government (2024, 28 November). *MEDIA STATEMENT: A Fresh Start for Queensland: Path to Treaty Act repealed as Indigenous communities receive direct funding boost*. Queensland Cabinet and Ministerial Directory webpage. <https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/101654#::-:text=The%20Government’s%20intention%20to%20repeal,more%20than%20a%20year%20ago>.

²⁴ ANTaR (2025, 12 February). Treaty in the Northern Territory. *Treaties in the States and Territories* webpage. <https://antar.org.au/issues/treaty/states-territories/northern-territory/#::-:text=The%20Northern%20Territory%20treaty%20process,after%20it%20was%20first%20announced>.

²⁵ Closing the Gap (undated). *Closing the Gap Targets and Outcomes*. <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/targets>

²⁶ Ipsos Issues Monitor (2024, 29 May). Interest in national Indigenous issues at lowest level since 2021. *News & Events* webpage. <https://www.ipsos.com/en-au/interest-national-indigenous-issues-lowest-level-2021#::-:text=Interest%20in%20Indigenous%20issues%20has%20declined%3A%20just%2016%25%20of%20Australians,to%2057%25%20in%202023>.

²⁷ Ipsos Issues Monitor, Interest in national Indigenous issues at lowest level since 2021.

²⁸ Smith, *Our ears (and hearts) “on the ground.”*

²⁹ Butler, D. (2023, 17 October). The referendum is over, the Voice rejected. Where to from here? *SBS*. Special Broadcasting Service. <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/the-referendum-is-over-the-voice-rejected-where-to-from-here/vjhuit9y>

³⁰ Smith, *Our ears (and hearts) “on the ground.”*

³¹ Smith, M. (2024, Summer issue). Meeting Nanny Nellie. *Australian Museum Explore Magazine*. https://australian.museum/publications/explore_summer2024/nanny-nellie/

³² Australian Museums and Galleries Association (2024, 17 September). *MEDIA RELEASE: Winners of the 2024 AMAgA Awards announced*. <https://www.amaga.org>.

au/common/Uploaded%20files/National%20Awards/Media%20Release%20-%20AMaGA%20Awards%202024%20.pdf

⁵³ Australian Museum (2021). *Unsettled exhibition*. Exhibition webpage on the Australia Museum's website. <https://australian.museum/learn/first-nations/unsettled/>

⁵⁴ FiftyFive5, *Exit Survey – Unsettled Visitors*: referred to in Smith, *Our ears (and hearts) "on the ground."*

⁵⁵ FiftyFive5, *Exit Survey – Unsettled Visitors*: referred to in Smith, *Our ears (and hearts) "on the ground."* In particular, C5 – To what extent do you agree that this exhibition informed your understanding about First Nations culture and Australian history? // C6 – Which subject areas, in particular, increased your understanding? Base: *Unsettled* visitors who were asked deep-dive (non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visitors, N=107).

⁵⁶ Payne, A. M. and Norman, H. (2024). *Coming to terms with the past? Identifying barriers and enablers of truth-telling*. Report on pilot research project, commissioned by Reconciliation Australia. Sydney, NSW: Reconciliation Australia. <https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Barriers-and-enablers-to-truth-telling-report.pdf>: 5.

⁵⁷ FiftyFive5, *Exit Survey – Unsettled Visitors*: referred to in Smith, *Our ears (and hearts) "on the ground."* In particular, C2 – What did you learn at this exhibition? What was your main takeaway? What were the best parts? Base: *Unsettled* visitors who were asked deep-dive (N=128).

⁵⁸ Payne and Norman, *Coming to Terms with the past?*, 5.

⁵⁹ Payne and Norman, *Coming to Terms with the past?*, 6. Note: the First Nations Curatorial Team used the same free postcard takeaway format for the *Barka: A Forgotten River* exhibition in 2023. Reconciliation Australia (2022). *2022 Australian Reconciliation Barometer*. Report on the findings of biennial national research study. Kingston, ACT: Author. <https://www.reconciliation.org.au/publication/2022-australian-reconciliation-barometer/> noted that within the previous 12-month period, only 6% of non-Indigenous respondents had participated in a truth-telling activity: 110.

⁴⁰ FiftyFive5, *Exit Survey – Unsettled Visitors*: referred to in Smith, *Our ears (and hearts) "on the ground."* In particular, C7 – Now that you have seen the *Unsettled* exhibition, which, if any, of these are you likely to do? Base: *Unsettled* visitors who were asked deep-dive (non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visitors, N=118); Australian Museum (2021). *Unsettled* exhibition free takeaway postcard (2021). Australian Museum produced and printed.

⁴¹ FiftyFive5, *Exit Survey – Unsettled Visitors*: referred to in Smith, *Our ears (and hearts) "on the ground."*

⁴² Smith, *Our ears (and hearts) "on the ground."*

⁴³ Reconciliation Australia, *2022 Australian Reconciliation Barometer*, 3.

⁴⁴ Foster, B. (2024, 16 May). Indigenous helpline 13YARN inundated with racism-related calls post referendum. *National Indigenous Times*. <https://nit.com.au/16-05-2024/11443/indigenous-helpline-13yarn-inundated-with-racism-related-calls-post-referendum>; Foley, Gibbs-Muir and Scully, Racism still rife, but NAIDOC Week a time for positivity say leaders as they look to the future with hope.

⁴⁵ Applebaum, B. (2010). Race, critical race theory and whiteness. In Peterson, P., Tierney, R., Baker, E., and McGaw, B. (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of education* (3rd ed., 36–43). Elsevier: cited in Cleland, J., Adair, D., and Parry, K. (2022). Fair Go? Indigenous Rugby League Players and the Racial Exclusion of the Australian National Anthem. *Communication & Sport*, 10(1), 74–96: 80. See also: Rutherford, *How to Argue With a Racist*.

⁴⁶ O'Donnell, J. (2023). *Mapping Social Cohesion 2023*. Report on the findings of national research survey, commissioned by the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute. <https://scanloninstitute.org.au/mapping-social-cohesion-2023>: 96.

⁴⁷ Braswell, P. (2022, 19 October). This is the difference between racism and racial bias. *Fast Company*. <https://www.fastcompany.com/90796690/this-is-the-difference-between-racism-and-racial-bias>

⁴⁸ McBride, L. and Smith, M. (2021). *Unsettled: Uncovering our nation's hidden history*. <https://australian.museum/learn/first-nations/unsettled-uncovering-our-nations-hidden-history/>

⁴⁹ Shirodkar, S. (2019). Bias against Indigenous Australians: Implicit association test results for Australia. *Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues*, 22(3–4), 3–34.

⁵⁰ Ben et al., *Racism Data in Australia*, 242.

⁵¹ Sentance, N. and Field, J. (2023). *The "pygmy" myth debunked*. Australian Museum webpage. <https://australian.museum/learn/first-nations/debunking-australian-pygmy-people-myth/>

⁵² Ben et al., *Racism Data in Australia*, 237.

⁵³ Reconciliation Australia, *2022 Australian Reconciliation Barometer*, 3.

⁵⁴ O'Donnell, *Mapping Social Cohesion 2023*, 32–41.

⁵⁵ Polity Research & Consulting (2022). *Australian Reconciliation Barometer 2022 Full Research Report*. Lead consultant Dr Darryl Nelson, commissioned report for Reconciliation Australia. <https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/2022-Australian-Reconciliation-Barometer-FULL-Report.pdf>, 13.

⁵⁶ Jash, Michelmore, and Williams, Life after the Voice referendum. See also reference to the term and related data from the 1998 Australian Federal Government's commissioned *Eureka* report (unpublished) regarding its surveys into race and racism in Australia: Jakubowicz, A. (undated). *Racism, anti-racism campaigns and Australian social research: a case study in recovering socially-useful knowledge*. Blog post. <https://andrewjakubowicz.com/publications/antiracism1998/>

⁵⁷ Jash, Michelmore, and Williams, Life after the Voice referendum.

⁵⁸ Cleland, Adair, and Parry, *Fair Go?*, 75. See also: Barry, N. (2017, 27 January). In Australia, land of the "fair go", not everyone gets an equal slice of the pie. *The Conversation (Australia)*. <https://theconversation.com/in-australia-land-of-the-fair-go-not-everyone-gets-an-equal-slice-of-the-pie-70480>

⁵⁹ Chui, H., et al. (2020). Personal and societal factors on prejudice against Aboriginal peoples, immigrants, racial minorities, and refugees among churchgoers in Australia. In R. W. Hood and S. Cheruvallil (Eds.). *Research in the social scientific study of religion*. Volume 31. Leiden: Brill, 273–299: cited in Ben et al., *Racism Data in Australia*, 237.

⁶⁰ Oba, Y. (2024, 12 March). *Understanding the diversity within the First Nations of Australia is crucial when engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and building meaningful relationships*. *Australia Explained* podcast episode-related article. SBS. Special Broadcasting Service. <https://www.sbs.com.au/language/english/en/podcast-episode/the-importance-of-understanding-cultural-diversity-among-indigenous-peoples/t81z4xrhr>

⁶¹ Smith, *Our ears (and hearts) "on the ground."*

⁶² O'Donnell, *Mapping Social Cohesion 2023*, 6.

⁶³ Jash, Michelmore, and Williams, Life after the Voice referendum.

⁶⁴ Jash, Michelmore, and Williams, Life after the Voice referendum.

⁶⁵ Polity Research & Consulting, *Australian Reconciliation Barometer 2022*, 117.

⁶⁶ Australian Human Rights Commission (2024, 17 October). National consultations show widespread, systemic racism damaging lives. *Race Discrimination* webpage. <https://humanrights.gov.au/about/news/national-consultations-show-widespread-systemic-racism-damaging-lives>; Australian Human Rights Commission (2024, 10 July). New report finds governments at all levels across Australia failing on racism. Media Release on *Race Discrimination* webpage. <https://humanrights.gov.au/about/news/media-releases/new-report-finds-governments-all-levels-across-australia-failing-racism>

⁶⁷ See First Nations Co., *An Anti-Racism Framework: Voices of First Nations Peoples*. 13.

Appendices



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Exhibition Community Consultation

Dear Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Members,

Re: Permanent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Exhibition 2025

The Australian Museum (AM) respects the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to represent themselves and their cultures within the Australian Museum. We understand that historically the Museum has not fully respected those rights.

The AM's audiences have been increasing, and in 2022 the Museum will see approximately one million visitors pass through its doors. For many of these visitors, the Museum is the first point of contact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. In 2018, we ran a large-scale community consultation for an exhibition responding to the 250th Cook anniversary. This consultation resulted in the 2021-2022 *Unsettled* exhibition, which broke new ground in truth-telling at the AM.

In 2025, we will open a new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander exhibition in the AM's permanent galleries, and we would like to hear from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to help us set the direction, themes, and topics of this new exhibition.

To ensure that we understand what the community think should be communicated within this gallery, the First Nations Division at the AM will be conducting consultation from January to June 2023. We invite you to have your say, to tell us what themes and stories you would like presented in this new exhibition.

You can have your say by completing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Exhibition Survey and/or by contacting the First Nations team to arrange an interview or meeting. Results will be compiled and shared online in 2023.

E: aboriginal.exhibition@australian.museum

We thank you for your participation and feedback.

Ms. Kim McKay AO
Director & CEO

AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM 1 William Street Sydney NSW 2010 Australia australian.museum
T 61 2 9320 6001 E aboriginal.exhibition@australian.museum



Have your say!

This is a voluntary survey for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The information from this survey will be used to inform what stories should be told at the Australian Museum.

Are you Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander? (please circle)

Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Both Neither

If Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, what is your Nation, Language Group or Community?

What is your residential postcode?

These responses will be collected for the consultation report and may be quoted anonymously. If you're to be quoted with your name, please write below.

Would you be willing to be involved in a workshop and/or be contacted by the First Nations team?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, please provide your contact details:

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T 61 2 9320 6001 E aboriginal.exhibition@australian.museum

continues over page

Appendix 1: 'Have your say!' letter from the Director of the Australian Museum.
Note the original proposed Exhibition date and consultation findings distribution date, which have since been revised accordingly.

Appendix 2: 'Have your say!' survey, page 1

When did you last come to the Australian Museum?

Never Over 5 years ago Between 3–5 years In the last two years

Did you see a particular exhibition(s)?

What words/thoughts come to mind when you think about the Australian Museum?

What are the primary themes, topics, or stories you would like to see in the new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander exhibition?

What do you NOT want to see in the new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander exhibition?

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Consultation Report 2025

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