



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Federation Chamber**

**CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS**

**NAIDOC Week**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 14 July 2014**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Monday, 14 July 2014  
**Page** 7841  
**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Broadbent, Russell, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr BROADBENT** (McMillan) (10:35): This year's NAIDOC Week had the theme of Serving Country, honouring all Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders who have fought in Australian wars. This aspect of history has been somewhat neglected by this nation, but that is now changing. The Serving Our Country project aims to collect the personal stories of Indigenous servicemen and servicewomen around the country. Indigenous soldiers often found it difficult to join, with prejudice a significant barrier for many. As our now Governor-General Peter Cosgrove said in a newspaper article last year:

They were not obliged, of course, to serve. In fact ... they were discouraged from serving, but so many of them volunteered.

The Governor-General described the Indigenous soldiers who managed to join as 'magnificent' soldiers.

In the 11 July edition of the *Warragul & Baw Baw Citizen*, guest columnist Kurnai elder Linda Mullett said that, despite a proud history of serving the nation in all Australia's major conflicts and peacekeeping efforts, Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander soldiers were not even considered citizens until 1960. And the story is told that, even though they were allowed to serve their nation when they arrived home, they could not be served a beer in a pub. The way we cared for many of our soldiers who did return from war—especially those of darker skin—has been an embarrassment to the nation over a long period of time.

In this NAIDOC Week, people are celebrating that which is important: remembering those that served—whoever they were, whatever station they came from in this country—and what they gave to this nation, to their own families and to the wellbeing of this nation to this day. Having a former serving officer, a brigadier, sitting beside me today makes the situation even more poignant. Whilst we who have not served can empathise with those who have served, until such time as you have lived the life you cannot fully grasp nor understand the importance of their service. To be an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person and be further discriminated against and not recognised must be devastating for the individual. To be a comrade one day and discarded the next must be the greatest pain that you can inflict on any individual in this nation.

Having said those words, I am proud to identify with this NAIDOC Week's theme and all those who served this country, of whatever colour, creed or background they came from. I salute them, I honour them and I wish their families all the best.