

Cathy Freeman

- Olympic Athlete

Born: 16 February 1973

Occupation: Athlete

Born in Mackay to a mother is of the Kuku Yalanji people and a father of the Burri Gubba people, Cathy Freeman is one of the most well-known Indigenous Australians. She was the first Indigenous Australian to win a gold medal at the Commonwealth Games in Canada in 1994, at age 16. Freeman competed in many championship events throughout the 90s and was selected to light the torch at the Sydney Olympics in 2000, where she won gold in the 400m event.

Freeman retired in 2003 and became involved with many charities. In 2007, she founded the Cathy Freeman Foundation, which liaised with four remote Indigenous communities and worked to close the gap in education between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Until 2012, she was an Ambassador of the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation.

Her sporting achievements have inspired athletes of all ages.

Albert Namatjira

- Artist

Born: 28 July 1902

Died: 8 August 1959

Occupation: Artist

Albert Namatjira was a Western Arrernte man born in a Lutheran mission near Alice Springs. He lived there until the age of 13, where he returned to the bush and learnt the ways of his traditional culture, later becoming an elder.

Namatjira was introduced to western-style painting by two Melbourne artists who held an exhibition at his mission. He was the artists' tour guide in the area, and in return, was shown how to paint with watercolours. Namatjira's artworks were colourful and depicted the rugged Australian landscape. His first exhibition was held in Melbourne in 1938. His paintings were extremely popular and sold quickly over the next 10 years. He was awarded the Queen's Coronation Medal in 1953.

Namatjira's artworks are on public display in many major Australian art galleries.

Neville Bonner

- Politician

Born: 28 March 1922

Died: 5 February 1999

Occupation: Senator

Neville Bonner was born into the Minjungbal people in northern New South Wales and in later life became an Elder of the Jagera people. His early life saw him move to North Queensland and work as a labourer before joining the Liberal Party. Bonner was chosen to fill the seat of a Senator who had resigned in 1971, and was re-elected in the following years until he resigned in 1983. After resigning from politics, Bonner worked with the Indigenous Advisory Council, Amnesty International and other organisations to improve Indigenous welfare.

Bonner served on many Senate and Parliamentary Committees and was a respected commentator on Indigenous issues. In 1979, he was jointly named Australian of the Year and was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia in 1984. Bonner was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from Griffith University in 1993.

The Queensland federal electorate of Bonner was created in 2004 in his honour.

Ernie Dingo

- Television Personality

Born: 31 July 1956

Occupation: Television Personality

Ernie Dingo was born a Yamatji man on Bullardo Station in the Murchison region of Western Australia. He became an actor and his film career began in the early 1980s. He starred in many major Australian movies and TV series.

Dingo hosted the popular television show 'The Great Outdoors' and starred in the major Australian movie musical 'Bran Nue Dae'. He also narrated the Indigenous segment of the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games.

As recognition of his services to the performing arts, Dingo was made a Member of the Order of Australia in 1990.

Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu

- Musician

Born: 1970

Died: 25 July 2017

Occupation: Musician

Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu grew up on Elcho Island, off the coast of tropical North East Arnhemland, as a member of the Gumatj clan of the Yolgnu nations. Gurrumul, born blind, is famous for his powerfully emotive voice. He sings stories of his land in both languages, Galpu and English.

Gurrumul's debut album 'Gurrumul' sold over half a million copies worldwide and reached Triple Platinum in Australia. Gurrumul has won fans all over the world with his angelic voice and has performed for dignitaries such as The Queen of England and US President Barack Obama.

Gurrumul established the Gurrumul Foundation in April 2013. The foundation's vision is to create greater opportunities for remote Indigenous young people to realise their full potential and contribute to culturally vibrant and sustainable communities.

Eddie Mabo

– Land Rights Advocate

Born: 29 June 1936

Died: 21 January 1992

Occupation: Land Rights Advocate

Eddie Mabo, originally born Eddir Koiki Sambo, was born on the island of Mer (Murray Island) to the Piadram clan in the Torres Strait between Australia and Papua New Guinea. Mabo worked on pearling boats, as a cane cutter and as a railway fettler before becoming a gardener at James Cook University in Townsville.

In 1981, a land rights conference was held at the University and Mabo made a speech to the audience explaining the land inheritance system on Murray Island. This speech led to Mabo becoming an advocate for Indigenous land rights. He is well known for his role in the landmark decision of the High Court of Australia which overturned the legal doctrine of terra nullius (“land belonging to nothing, no one”) which characterised Australian law with regard to land and title.

Mabo is recognised as a champion for Indigenous people’s rights.