

ACTIVITY 2

What citizenship rights existed in Australia by 1967?

This activity helps students explore the material in the *Australia in the 1950s* section of the website. <http://www.nma.gov.au/indigenoustrights/>

The tables below will help you summarise the **state of citizenship rights in Australia by 1967**.

- 1 Look at **Table 1**. What rights do you think a citizen of Australia **should have** for each of the areas listed in column 1? Summarise your answers in column 2. One example has been done to help you.

STATE OF CITIZENSHIP RIGHTS IN AUSTRALIA BY 1967

TABLE 1

TABLE 2

1 Area of rights	2 Desired rights: I think that ...	3 Situation Today You	4 Situation by 1967								
			5 Non-Indigenous	6 Indigenous					10		
7 NSW	8 NT	9 QLD		10 SA	11 VIC	12 WA					
State vote	<i>Citizens should be able to vote in State elections.</i>	✓	✓								✗
Federal Vote											
Marriage											
Control of children											
Freedom of movement											
Ownership of property											
Right to fair wages											
Right to drink alcohol											
Right to social Services											

- 2 Now tick or cross if Australian citizens actually have these rights today (Column 3). You may know this, or you may need to undertake some research to find out. One example has been done to help you.
- 3 Now look at the documents below, and use the information to complete **Table 2** above, by ticking or crossing whether non-Indigenous citizens (column 4) and Indigenous citizens in the different States and Northern Territory (columns 5–10) had these rights by 1967. (Note that there is no column for Tasmania as it was believed that there were no Indigenous Australians in Tasmania at the time.) One example has been partly done to help you.

SOURCE 2.1

Aboriginal Australians' rights by 1967

Here is a summary of rights enjoyed by Aboriginal people by 1967. Most aspects of Aboriginal peoples' lives were controlled by State Governments and laws. In some areas, such as old age pensions, the Commonwealth controlled the laws. (The Commonwealth also controlled Aboriginal people's rights in the Northern Territory.)

	NSW	VIC	SA	WA	QLD	*NT (Cwth)
Areas of rights controlled by individual states						
Voting rights (State)	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	YES
Marry freely	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO
Control own children	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO
Move freely	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Own property freely	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO
Receive award wages	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Alcohol allowed	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Areas of rights controlled by Commonwealth						
Invalid & Old Age Pensions (since 1959)	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Australian Citizenship (since 1962)	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

- 4 Who had the greater control over most Aboriginal people's lives and rights — State Governments or the Commonwealth Government?
- 5 Did Aboriginal people have equal rights to other Australians?
- 6 Laws affecting Aboriginal people could be changed by State Governments (affecting the people who lived in that State), or by the Commonwealth Government (affecting all Aboriginal people in those areas of law-making covered by the Commonwealth). Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of relying on State Governments to make changes, and of relying on the Commonwealth Government to create equality.

It was not only legislation that could affect Aboriginal people's access to rights — it could also depend on the public servants whose job it was to enforce the law.

Look at the following example of West Australian man Norman Bilson and answer the questions that follow.

SOURCE 2.2

NORMAN BILSON, (Wangkai name Walaru) dictated a letter as follows to be sent to the Native Welfare Officer in Kalgoorlie applying for an Age Pension on 23 November, 1959:

Dear Sir,

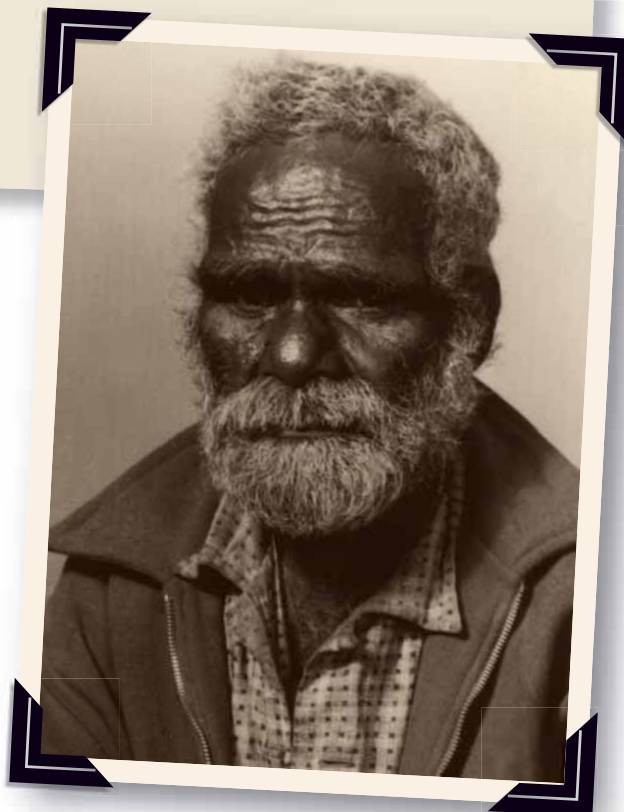
Please will you help me to apply for an Old Age Pension to be paid to me in money at the Post Office in Kalgoorlie.

I feel I am finished now and my eyesight is going. I can't do any more station work and there is no other work for me to do! My first work was at Old McComishes cattle station at Laverton after my brother Alec finished work there. It was all cattle work then, and when cattle were given up I broke in horses that were sent to Perth. I worked for Old McComish till he died. Then I went to work for Billy and Jasper Bright on their Kookynie Station, and I have worked there ever since, they have cattle and sheep and horses. I have always worked on the same station, first for McComish and then for Brights.

But I am not up to the work now. My age is seventy. I believe I am seventy because I was a man when the First War started.

Yours Truly,

Norman Bilson (his mark)



Box 12/6, Council for Aboriginal Rights (Vic.) Papers, MS 12913, State Library of Victoria
<http://www.nma.gov.au/indigenoustrights/subsection211b.html?sslID=73>

The District Officer for Native Welfare wrote in reply on 8 June, 1960 as follows:

NORMAN BILSON – is not seventy years of age as stated by Mrs Bennett and is not yet old enough for the Age Pension. He is engaged at pastoral work.

Norman Bilson still complained of his sight and when he met Mr John McInnes whom he had known in the early days of the goldfields he asked him what age he was. McInnes wrote the following letter:

31/10/1960

Referring to Norman Bilson in 1914 he would have been about twenty years of age, when I first got acquainted with him. He was always a smart industrious boy and as far as I know always led a sober industrious life. Because he appears to have a good constitution should not debar him from getting a pension to which I am sure he is justly entitled ...

Yours Sincerely,

(Signed) John McInnes.

A note on the file reads:

Norman has had trouble with his sight the whole of this year. Dr Illingsworth says Norman Bilson has cataract and wrote a letter for Norman to deliver to the District Officer for Native Welfare. It is understood that Norman will have an invalid pension and treatment.

<http://www.indigenoustrights.net.au/document.asp?ssid=1&isid=78>

- 7 Why did Norman Bilson have a right to a pension?
- 8 Why was he not able to exercise that right initially?
- 9 What had to happen before he could exercise that right?
- 10 What does this tell us about:
 - State and Commonwealth laws about Aboriginal people's citizen rights
 - having a right in theory and in practice?

The National Museum of Australia **Collaborating for Indigenous Rights** website summarises the situation in this way:

SOURCE 2.3

The 'two worlds' of Australia

Australia in the immediate post-war period consisted of two separate worlds. The vast majority of its people lived in a world of houses serviced with water and power, where laws ensured social order, where people on the whole had jobs to do and enough to eat and, if they didn't, the State helped them through hard times. Most people lived in or near cities. They were proud to be subjects of the Queen and believed that they lived in a fair and just democracy, unhindered by problems such as class distinctions in Britain, or racial tensions in the United States or South Africa.

The other world was inhabited by people whose ancestors had lived here for many generations – the Indigenous Australians. By the 1950s most had lost their lands and lived in poverty on the fringes of non-Indigenous society. Many were not eligible for the dole or other State or federal benefits which non-Indigenous people received. State laws controlled where many Indigenous people could live, where they could or couldn't move and whom they could marry. Many Indigenous Australians were not legal guardians of their own children and were not permitted to manage their own earnings.

There was little contact between the inhabitants of these two worlds and the majority were ignorant of or indifferent to the difficulties faced by Indigenous Australians. Some, who were both aware of Indigenous disadvantage and doing what they could to address it, recognised the possibilities of a grass-roots reform movement to bring the rights and protections of Australian citizenship to all Australians.

<http://www.nma.gov.au/indigenoustrights/subsection211b.html?ssid=73>

- 11 Based on all the information in this Activity complete a statement about citizenship rights in Australia in 1967. Your statement should explain why you think this situation was undesirable and unacceptable. Your answer should cover two areas: citizenship rights in theory, and in practice.

Citizenship rights in Australia were ...

- 12 Why do you think the situation existed that not all Australian citizens had equal rights?

One solution proposed for this situation was to give the Commonwealth Parliament power to make laws affecting Aboriginal people. Why might this make a difference? How could the legal situation, and the reality of Aboriginal citizenship rights, be changed? These questions will be the focus of the next Activity.

