

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Library

Sorry Books

MS 4398

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COLLECTION SUMMARY

Title: Sorry Books
Collection no: MS 4398
Date range: 1998-2005
Extent: 0.18 metres (2 boxes)
Repository Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

ACCESS TO COLLECTION

Access and use conditions

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Preferred citation

Items from this collection should be cited as [Title or description of manuscript item], Sorry books, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, MS 4398, Box [nn], Item [nn]

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COLLECTION OVERVIEW

Scope and content note

This collection consists of Sorry Books from donors who wanted to ensure that these books were added to the significant collections of Sorry Books held by AIATSIS Library. These collections include [MS 3569](#), donated by the organisers of the National Sorry Day held on 26 May 1998, and [MS 3795](#) donated by [Australians for Native Title \(ANT\)](#).

The Sorry Books were made available, for all Australians to sign, at various locations throughout the country during the Sorry Books campaign. The campaign was organised by Australians for Native Title (ANT) and officially launched in January 1998.

The collection of Sorry Books held at [MS 3795](#) contains some of the administrative records relating to the Sorry Books campaign which can provide information on the organisations that purchased books. In particular, Item 304 of this collection contains a set of photocopies of request forms arranged numerically from 1-203 and Items 297-303 consist of completed order forms arranged alphabetically by organisation. The number assigned to each book is recorded on these forms. Item 307 consists of various lists of locations of books which also gives their number.

Provenance

The books in this collection have come from various donors. Details can be found in the Item Descriptions section.

Related material

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Important: Before clicking on the link to the catalogue entries below please read our [sensitivity message](#).

The Library also holds a Sorry Books collection, donated by the organisers of the 1998 National Sorry Day at [MS 3569](#) and a collection donated by Australians for Native Title at [MS 3795](#).

The J.S. Batty Library of Western Australian History holds 45 Sorry Books from Western Australia at MN 2114. Further information can be found on the State Library of Western Australia [catalogue](#) and [collection listing](#)

The State Library of South Australia holds 26 Sorry Books signed by the South Australian community. Further information is available on the State Library of South Australia [Archival Database](#)

For a complete listing of material [about](#) the Sorry books or [about](#) Sorry Day, consult [Mura[®], the AIATSIS catalogue](#)

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BACKGROUND NOTE

The Sorry Books were an initiative of the group, [Australians for Native Title \(ANT\)](#), which was formed in June 1997. They were seen as an opportunity for ordinary Australians to do something in response to the Federal Government's refusal to make a formal apology to the Stolen Generations.

The Sorry Books campaign was launched by Hazel Hawke and Bryce Courtenay on Australia Day 1998, in a ceremony at Circular Quay in Sydney, New South Wales. Other prominent Australians who attended the ceremony and signed Sorry Books included Jim McLelland, Elizabeth Evatt, Faith Bandler, Robyn Williams, Ruth Cracknell, Anne Deveson, John Bell and Anne Thomson. Organisers estimated that over 5,000 people signed one of four books which were available on the day at the Museum of Contemporary Arts or the Opera House.

A launch in London was held on 26 March at Australia House. It was supported by a number of well known Australians living in London including radio personality, Jonathon Coleman; author, Kathy Lette; actor, Mark Little and gay rights activist, Peter Tatchell. Another signing took place in the House of Commons on 7 April where 14 British Members of Parliament signed the book. The books were later available for signing at the Earls Court offices of *Southern Cross* and *TNT*. Here the books were signed by many expatriates as well as locals and tourists from many countries around the world.

The first official books that were produced (around 200) were of A4 size with a hard cover and containing 80 pages. Due to the huge demand for books, they were later replaced by a soft covered, green book consisting of 20 pages. The books were made of archival paper and archival pens were also supplied to ensure the survival of the books for future generations. Australians for Native Title were assisted in the distribution and movement of books by a group with similar aims known as [Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation \(ANTaR\)](#) and a vast

network of volunteers. Each official book was numbered when an order was processed. This enabled a track to be kept of the location of the books at any given time during the campaign.

Around 650 official Sorry Books were circulated around Australia. They were displayed in a variety of places including local councils, libraries, museums, churches, bookshops, art galleries and schools. Some groups who ordered books had volunteers to take them around to different locations within their areas instead of leaving them in one place. The organising committee asked that books were returned to them after a month so they could be sent to another location for signing. Many organisations and individuals also made up their own books.

Each 'Sorry Book' contains the following apology:

'By signing my name in this book, I record my deep regret for the injustices suffered by Indigenous Australians as a result of European settlement and, in particular, I offer my personal apology for the hurt and harm caused by the forced removal of children from their families and for the effect of government policy on the human dignity and spirit of Indigenous Australians.'

'I would also like to record my desire for Reconciliation and for a better future for all our peoples. I make a commitment to a united Australia which respects this land of ours, values Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage and provides justice and equity for all'

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ONLINE EXHIBITION

Further information about the Sorry Books, and selections from the Sorry Books, can be seen on the AIATSIS [Sorry Books Online Exhibition](#).

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ITEM DESCRIPTIONS

Item

- 1 **Melbourne Midsumma Gay and Lesbian Community Festival Carnival Day, February 1999.** Includes signatures of the Lesbian and Gay Group for Reconciliation, Victoria and their friends

Unofficial 'Sorry Book'

This 'Sorry Book', was transferred to the Library by Lesbians and Gays for Reconciliation, Victoria in May 1999. It was originally catalogued as a pamphlet manuscript (PMS 5827), was added to MS 3569 in November 2002, and was transferred to this collection in October 2005

- 2 **Place of display unknown.** Includes signatures from South Australia and overseas.

Official 'Sorry Book' # 143. This is one of the books purchased by Australians for Reconciliation.

In August 2003 this Sorry Book was found at the Museum of Sydney and sent to AIATSIS for addition to its 'Sorry Books' collections.

Item

3 **AIATSIS.** Includes signatures from various places in Australia and the ACT. A number of AIATSIS staff members signed the book at the Sorry Day Morning Tea held at AIATSIS on 26 May 2005

4 **Place of display unknown.** Most signatories have not indicated an address. Signatures include those on behalf of the Canadian High Commission, National Caucus of Disability Consumer Organisations, Women's Electoral Lobby, Australian National Trust Organisations, National Ethnic Disability Alliance, Bahai Community and human rights community, Australian Local Government Association, Egyptian Embassy and people of Egypt, Government of Venezuela and YMCA Australia

Official 'Sorry Book' (unnumbered). This is possibly one of the twenty official books purchased by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) which donated it to the Library in 2005

5 **Campbelltown City Council.**

Official 'Sorry Book' (55).

Also information folder containing 'Welcome to Campbelltown City' letter from the Mayor and the Council's *Community report 2005/2006*

Donated to the Library by the Campbelltown City Council in January 2006

Finding aid compiled by J. Churches, October 2005; updated by J. Churches, February 2007

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