



# Victorian Women Vote 1908–2008

## Indigenous political rights in Victoria

**It wasn't until the 1960s that a number of legislative changes meant Indigenous women and men were finally able to vote across Australia.**

In 1902, women in Victoria received the vote for federal elections, but in a direct contradiction of this right, the 1902 Commonwealth Franchise Act specifically barred Indigenous people from voting.

In Victoria, the 1908 Act that gave the vote to Victorian women did not exclude Indigenous women. But they were deprived of the vote, as were Indigenous men by narrow, legal interpretations of the Australian Constitution that flowed on to Victoria and the other states.

The 1908 Victorian Act made no mention of excluding Indigenous people and ostensibly Indigenous women could therefore vote. However, at the same time Victorian legislation barred the vote to people in receipt of 'charitable relief', a term routinely applied to residents of Aboriginal reserves.

A further obstacle for Victorian Indigenous women was that gaining the state vote did not guarantee a federal vote. This confusing state of affairs continued until 1949 when legislation ensured that people with the state vote were guaranteed the federal vote.

**In 1962, the repeal of the 1902 Commonwealth Electoral Act gave Aborigines in all states, with the exception of Queensland, voting rights.**

The 1967 Referendum gave Indigenous people citizenship, for the first time counting them in the Australian census, allowing them to move freely from state to state and to have policy decided by the Commonwealth, rather than differing from state to state.

**Source:** John Chesterman and Brian Galligan, *Citizens Without Rights*

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