

# Australian Heroes 1

☆ Read the information below, cut it out and paste it into your book. Now choose one other Australian hero to research who you think has made a courageous contribution to Australian society.



## Fred Hollows

**N**ew Zealand-born Fred Hollows was an ophthalmologist who gave thousands of people their eyesight back. He believed strongly in equality for all people and after becoming aware of a desperate need for Aboriginal health services in Sydney, he set up the first Aboriginal Medical Service.

Fred was shocked to find that almost all Aboriginal people in outback communities had eye diseases caused by dirty conditions and poor health. In the 1970s he helped launch a national program to attack this problem. Fred Hollows had the gift of inspiring people to give their time to the program. In three years he travelled all over outback Australia, treating thirty thousand people, performing a thousand operations and prescribing more than ten thousand pairs of glasses.

By 1980, Fred was travelling all over the world to set up eye health programs in developing countries. Whilst overseas, he heard about a war in Eritrea, in Africa, and how doctors there were trying to get training in eye surgery—each year about two and a half million Africans go blind. This became Fred's passion, and he raised six million dollars to help Eritreans build their own eye lens factory.

By 1989, Fred Hollows knew he wouldn't live to see all his ideas happen. He died of cancer in 1993 and his wife, Gabi Hollows, continued his work. Eye lens factories have now been set up in Eritrea and other developing countries, giving sight back to thousands of people.

## Eddie Mabo

**E**ddie Koiki Mabo was a Torres Strait Islander after whom the historic Mabo decision by the High Court of Australia is named—the decision which overturned *terra nullius* or 'no-man's land', which the British claimed Australia was when they arrived here over 200 years ago.

Edward Koiki Sambo (as he was named at birth) was born in 1936 on Mer Island, also known as Murray Island, in the Torres Strait. His mother died soon after childbirth and he was raised by his mother's brother, Benny Mabo. From an early age, he was taught about his family's land.

When he was 17, a teenage prank landed Koiki in trouble with the island council and he was exiled. He worked on pearling boats and then got a job in Townsville on the railways. He became the spokesperson for the Torres Strait Island gang and came to interact with white Australian trade union officials.

In 1959 he married and went on to raise ten children. Koiki had many different jobs but from the age of 31 he worked as a gardener at James Cook University in Townsville. He used to sit in on seminars and would go to the library and read books about what white 'experts' said about his people.

In 1974 he had a discussion with Professor Noel Loos and a Henry Reynolds during which it became clear that Koiki was under the impression that he owned his land on Murray Island. After being told that it was in fact Crown land he was infuriated.

In 1981, a land rights conference was held at the university and Koiki made a very important speech about land ownership and land inheritance on Murray Island. A lawyer at the conference suggested there should be a test case to claim land rights through the court system.

The Murray Islanders decided they would be the ones to challenge the claim of *terra nullius* in the High Court and chose Koiki Mabo as their leader. After a 10-year battle, Justice Moynihan concluded that Koiki Mabo was not the son of Benny Mabo and so had no right to inherit Mabo land. For the first time, Koiki felt like giving up but, believing he was right, he threw himself back into the case, often to the detriment of his health.

In January 1992, Koiki Mabo died of cancer at the age of 56. Five months later the High Court announced its historic decision: that native title existed and it was up to the Aboriginal or Islander people to determine who owned what land.

That night, Murray Islanders performed a traditional ceremony not seen on their island for 80 years. Koiki Mabo, one of the great battlers of Australian society, had changed Australia's history.