



VICTORIA POLICE

Victoria Police Apology to the Stolen Generations
Victoria Police, Chief Commissioner Shane Patton APM

24 May 2024

I acknowledge that survivors of the Stolen Generations have called for an apology for police involvement in the forced removal of children for more than 27 years.

This apology is long overdue. As Chief Commissioner, and on behalf of Victoria Police, I am here with you today to formally, and unreservedly, apologise to survivors of the Stolen Generations and their families for the role Victoria Police played in the forcible removal of Aboriginal children from their families, Culture, and Country. I am sorry for the profound distress caused and the trauma experienced by so many Aboriginal families. When I reference Aboriginal families I am referring to children who were removed, their siblings, their parents, and their extended families. I also acknowledge the impact to the children of those who were removed and generations that come after them.

For over 100 years, whether on our own initiative or in assisting other agencies and organisations, Victoria Police contributed to the Stolen Generations by enforcing policies and laws. Victoria Police was historically one of several agencies with legislative responsibilities for the management and movement of Aboriginal Victorians. From 1864 to 1992, police had the power to remove what were deemed to be neglected children. The Board for the Protection of Aborigines also had power to remove children considered by the government as neglected or unprotected from 1871 and broad powers to remove any Aboriginal child from 1890 until 1957. Although poorly documented, it is indisputable that Victoria Police assisted the Board, which resulted in devastating consequences for Aboriginal families.

The responsibility for determining when a child was neglected or unprotected was shared across several agencies, including Victoria Police. I cannot begin to imagine the profound distress that the forceable separation of children from their families would have caused and that continues to be felt.

I acknowledge that the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families, carried out by Victoria Police, was not an isolated experience, but one that impacted many Aboriginal families throughout Victoria. Each removal of a child affected a great number of Aboriginal people, inflicting hurt and sorrow across generations. I am sorry that survivors of the Stolen Generations were disproportionately affected by recording practices, which meant that forcibly removed children were often treated as if they had a criminal record. Such unjust practices cast a false shadow over their character throughout their lives.

When Aboriginal people were brave enough to try to access police records to be reunified with family, police were often unwilling or unable to help. I am sorry that this so often further deepened the trauma, rather than providing healing or connection. Victoria Police has searched for evidence of the extent of police involvement in the Stolen Generations in the Victoria Police records held at the Victoria Police Archives Services Centre and the Public Record Office Victoria. Progress has been slow due to poor or fragmented recordkeeping, document disposal, illegible documents, records that do not record Aboriginality and lack of recording of informal child removal arrangements. We may sadly never know the exact number of Aboriginal children separated from their families through actions involving Victoria Police. I recognise that inadequate and incomplete recordkeeping directly contributes to compounding the impacts on Stolen Generations survivors and their descendants and their connection to Family, Community, Country, Language, Culture and Identity, and frustrates the desire that Aboriginal people have today for a full and frank account of police actions in the removal of children from their families.

As the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police, I have committed to working with the Aboriginal community to continue to enhance change and build trust and confidence with Victoria Police and the Aboriginal people.

We will ensure to continue delivering change by partnering and building trust with the Aboriginal community to achieve better outcomes.

This vital work is relevant to everyone who works in Victoria Police and builds on and aligns with our existing commitments within the relevant whole of government initiatives.

I want to conclude today's apology by saying to every Stolen Generations survivor, their families, and the entire Aboriginal community, for the harm caused through Victoria Police's actions, I am truly sorry.

Shane Patton APM

Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police