

# How the arrival of Europeans from 1788 impacted Aboriginal peoples

## GLOSSARY

**Australia's dominant culture:** the views, customs, behaviours and ideas that are, and have traditionally been held, by governments, schools, other institutions, and Australians who have British heritage.

**Clans:** a term that's sometimes used to describe Aboriginal language groups and communities with shared culture.

**Eora Country:** the land on which Sydney now sits. The Eora people comprise of a number of different clans.

**Europeans/British/early settlers/colonisers/occupiers/invaders/convicts/free settlers/First Fleet:** various terms used to describe Europeans who came to live in Australia.

**Frontier Wars:** the organised conflict that occurred between Aboriginal peoples defending their Country and Europeans who wanted to use land for their own purposes.

**Herd immunity:** the resistance to a disease that occurs in a community when enough people have become immune.

**Intergenerational trauma:** the ongoing physical, mental and emotional effects of past violence and injustices.

**Missions and reserves:** places created by the British where surviving Aboriginal peoples were required to live.

**Terra nullius:** a Latin term used in European law meaning 'land with no people'.

**Traditional Custodian:** a term used to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' sense of ownership and connection with their community's traditional lands.

**Treaty:** a formal agreement or settlement between two groups of people.



## The Wound

**Europeans** invaded and considered Australia falsely to be **terra nullius**, which denied humanity to Aboriginal peoples. The **Traditional Custodian** relationship to land was ignored. This was an act of invasion similar to other invasions in world history.

The **colonisers** had no understanding of, or respect for Aboriginal peoples on their traditional lands, and disregarded sacred Aboriginal sites and places of importance for sourcing food and materials.

In the early years, the colonisers brought diseases that killed what's generally estimated to be at least half of all Aboriginal peoples in south-eastern Australia. Aboriginal peoples were murdered, executed, massacred and violated while defending their land and cultures.

Aboriginal peoples waged **Frontier Wars** to defend their land. These Frontier Wars, and the people who fought in them, should be acknowledged and commemorated.



## Our History

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When Captain James Cook named **Eora Country** 'Botany Bay' in 1770, he was claiming the **British** rights to ownership of the east coast of Australia through the European concept of terra nullius. This meant that under European law the land was unoccupied by humans, so the British didn't have to negotiate with leaders or make a **treaty**. Cook, and the British who came afterwards were effectively claiming to be the first settlers on the land in the Sydney area.

When the **First Fleet** arrived in January 1788, they were under orders to minimise harm to Aboriginal peoples. However, as they began to clear the bush, fish, and hunt animals, conflict began.

At the same time, the first colonisers introduced a wave of epidemics including chickenpox, smallpox, typhoid, measles and influenza, to which Aboriginal peoples had no **herd immunity**. The diseases then spread into other Aboriginal nations ahead of colonisers. It's impossible to accurately determine the scale of deaths from disease; estimates typically range from 50 to 70 per cent of Aboriginal populations in south-eastern Australia.

The epidemics had a devastating effect on the Elders of Aboriginal communities. Their deaths, over a short period of time, meant the loss of much of the **clan's** knowledge systems that had developed, evolved and adapted for thousands of years. In some cases, their knowledge of vegetation, fauna, climate and landforms were lost in under two years.

The colonisers found it easy to clear Eora land: now called the Sydney basin. They wanted to extend their farmlands east, beyond the Blue Mountains and Darug Country, but the mountains were difficult for them to cross with the equipment they needed to establish farms. Conflict ensued and Frontier Wars were fought by the Darug people in defence of their land.

Survivors of the epidemics were faced with food shortages, as their traditional economies were disrupted. Native crops were wiped out, and many species were unable to survive due to the disruption of their ecosystem. Fish stocks were depleted by the large British population. Animals that were traditionally hunted for food often couldn't survive on the farmlands as their food and water sources were depleted and destroyed. The introduction and spread of European livestock had a particularly devastating impact on the existing ecosystems and environment, compressing soil and ruining Aboriginal croplands. The Eora peoples were faced with starvation and were eventually forced to rely on food rations from Europeans.

Historical texts from Europeans show that Aboriginal survivors often lived on the edge of European settlements. Later, the practice of forcibly moving survivors to **missions and reserves** further meant remaining knowledge about traditional lands, and separate, distinct languages were lost.