

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE 1967 REFERENDUM

MUCH ACHIEVED, STILL MUCH TO DO



GEOFF SHAW

RETURNED VIETNAM VETERAN
AND ABORIGINAL LEADER

“ My grandmother came from the Arrernte language group and my grandfather from near Barrow Creek.

I was born in the Todd River bed. I went to school in Alice Springs but didn't get much of an education. I went riding horses and branding cows like my father, and then joined the Army at 18.

When the 1967 referendum was held, I was in the jungles of Malaya. I was serving Australia in the armed forces and was told I was now recognised as an Australian. I was given the right to go into a pub. Like a lot of veterans, I found it hard to adjust to civilian life after the Army and was on skid row for a while – living in the long grass in Alice, Katherine and Darwin.

The referendum didn't go far enough but it did lead to better education, medical services and legal services for Aboriginal people, and eventually the Land Rights Act. Aboriginal people started demanding their rights and I began helping set up

our own organisations in Alice. I was deputy chair of the Central Land Council.

The referendum should have recognised Aboriginal people as the First Nations. Then we wouldn't be going through this whole process of trying to change the Constitution again. We have to get it right this time – we don't want to be waiting another 50 years before being acknowledged as the First Australians. ”

- Geoff Shaw

CELEBRATING

50
YEARS

May 27: the day two discriminatory sections in our Constitution were removed after a vote overwhelmingly in favour

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