

**My Place for Teachers  
Decade Overview 1990s**

Decade Summary	1998
<p>The 1990s was a decade marked by the effects of the economic and social revolutions from the previous two decades. The economic measures such as removing tariff protection from local industries and the freeing up of trade benefited many, but not all. There were substantial numbers of Australians who were worse-off as factories closed and manufacturing industries reduced job opportunities and the unemployed were often unable to transfer into the newly thriving retail, commercial and tourist sectors.</p> <p>Simultaneously, the newly arrived Vietnamese, Chinese, Islamic and other communities were changing the social fabric of Australian society. Nearly one in four Australians were born overseas, representing about 100 countries. Many Australians thought that it was time for Australia to become a republic and to work for reconciliation with Indigenous Australians. These issues were strongly supported by prime minister Paul Keating.</p> <p>The terms of two prime ministers dominated the 1990s. Paul Keating of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) was elected as prime minister from 1991 until 1996. Subsequently, John Howard was prime minister of a Liberal government from 1996 until he lost his parliamentary seat in 2007.</p> <p>Australia experienced the biggest change in technology. The 1990s saw the introduction of the internet and the mobile phone, which began to change the face of telecommunications and entertainment.</p>	<p><b>February</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Constitutional Convention was held in Old Government House, Canberra, and gave in principle support to Australia becoming a republic.</li> </ul> <p><b>April</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Patrick Stevedores sacked its workforce on the Australian waterfront, thus beginning the Waterfront Dispute with the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA).</li> </ul> <p><b>May</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The first Sorry Day was held on 26 May to commemorate the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families.</li> </ul> <p><b>June</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Queensland's state election, Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party won 23 per cent of the vote and 11 seats.</li> </ul> <p><b>July</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Senate passed the <i>Native Title Act Amendment Bill 1998</i> (Cth) after a debate lasting 105 hours.</li> </ul>

## History and Politics

<b>1990s recession</b>	<p>In June 1990, Victoria's largest building society, the Pyramid Building Society, collapsed. In July, property trusts in Victoria and NSW froze funds as a widespread crisis of confidence took hold.</p> <p>In 1990, the largest loss ever recorded in Australia's corporate history (\$1.345 billion) was recorded by the State Bank of Victoria after a series of bad loans had been made in the late 1980s. In February 1991, the South Australian government was forced to bail out the South Australian State Bank, which faced losses of \$3 billion.</p> <p>In December 1991, Compass Airlines, Australia's first low-cost airline, which had been operating for little more than a year, collapsed as a business and thousands of passengers were left stranded.</p> <p>In November 1992, unemployment reached 11.4 per cent of the workforce; the highest rate since the Great Depression of the 1930s.</p>
<b>Business failures</b>	<p>In December 1990, businessman Alan Bond was arrested in Perth on criminal charges relating to his financial rescue of Rothwells merchant bank in 1987. In May 1992, he was sentenced to more than two years in prison.</p> <p>In June 1991, entrepreneur Christopher Skase was declared bankrupt with personal debts of \$170 million and faced charges related to the collapse of his company Qintex. To avoid prosecution he escaped to Spain, pursued by the Australian government. Skase spent 11 months in a jail hospital, eventually dying in Spain from poor health. Australia never succeeded in recovering any of the lost funds.</p>
<b>Indigenous Australia: achievements and controversies</b>	<p>In 1991, the <i>Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act 1991</i> (Cth) was passed by federal parliament to promote reconciliation between Indigenous Australians and the wider Australian community.</p> <p>In December 1992, prime minister Paul Keating made his historic Redfern speech, in which he acknowledged the injustices committed against Indigenous peoples and pledged support for the reconciliation process.</p> <p>In June 1992, a High Court judgement was made on the Mabo case. The court recognised traditional rights to the Torres Strait Islands, known as right of native title, and overturned the previous legal assumption of <i>terra nullius</i> (that Australia had been legally unoccupied when white settlers first arrived). Eddie Mabo, who had been instrumental in bringing the legal challenge to the High Court, had died in January that year.</p> <p>In 1997, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission published their report <i>Bringing Them Home</i> on the forcible removal of Aboriginal children from their families. Commissioners Mick Dodson and Sir Ronald Wilson launched the report.</p> <p>In 1997, the Reconciliation Convention on the traditional lands of the Kulin peoples in Melbourne opened.</p>
<b>Kuwait and East Timor</b>	<p>On 13 and 14 August 1990, three navy warships left Sydney for the Persian Gulf to enforce the UN embargo against Iraq after its annexation of Kuwait in what became known as the First Iraq War. They provided naval support for the US-led Operation Desert Storm, and afterwards enforced sanctions on Iraq.</p>

	<p>In early September 1999, the UN Headquarters in Dili filled with refugees in the aftermath of killings and violence that followed the East Timor vote for independence. On 10 September, the RAAF began airlifting UN staff and refugees from the headquarters. Six days later Indonesia abrogated the 1995 mutual security treaty that had been signed by prime minister Paul Keating and Indonesian president Suharto. On 20 September, Australian troops led a UN peace-keeping force into East Timor, under Australia's Major General Peter Cosgrove. They have been stationed there almost continuously ever since.</p>
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## Society and Culture

### Women

In 1990, Joan Kirner became Victoria's first female premier, and Australia's second.

In 1990, for the first time women in Australia's defence forces were allowed to take part in combat-related duties. Women sailors were on board HMAS *Westralia* when it was sent into a combat zone in 1991. Women served as medical personnel in Iraq, Rwanda and Western Sahara in the early 1990s.

In 1992, Sharelle Quinn became Australia's first female international captain with Qantas airlines.

In November 1999, 440 women were part of the Australian force of 5,500 deployed to East Timor.

In February 1991, Dame Roma Mitchell became governor of South Australia. She was the first woman to hold vice-regal office anywhere in Australia. A keen advocate of women's rights, she was the first woman to be made a Queen's Counsel, the first to be made a Justice of a Supreme Court (1965) and first to be a chancellor of an Australian University (University of Adelaide, 1983–90).

In March 1992, the first Anglican women were ordained as priests when ten women were ordained at St George's Cathedral in Perth.

### The Australian republic issue

In 1992, prime minister Paul Keating announced that the federal, state and territory governments had agreed that there would no longer be recommendations made to the Queen for Australians to receive imperial awards such as being made a knight or a dame.

A 1992 proclamation ordained that National Wattle Day would be held on 1 September from 1993. In the same year, a new citizenship oath was incorporated. From this point on, new Australian citizens were no longer required to swear allegiance to the Queen and her heirs, but use the words of the Australian Citizenship Pledge.

In July 1993, only 35 per cent of Australians declared themselves to be monarchists. In 1998, a constitutional convention to debate a republic for Australia was held in Old Parliament House, Canberra. Half the participants were chosen by the conservative prime minister John Howard.

In November 1999, a referendum was held on the model for a republic decided upon by the convention. The results showed 55 per cent of Australians voted against the proposal of adopting the republic model suggested by the government.

### The Arts

In 1991, the Yothu Yindi single *Treaty* became a national and international hit. Their album *Tribal Voice* went double-platinum. In the same year, the children's music group The Wiggles began performing and Tim Winton's novel *Cloudstreet* was published. It won the 1992 Miles Franklin Award.

In 1992, the romantic comedy *Strictly Ballroom*, directed by Baz Luhrman, was released to a local and international audience. In the same year, a portrait of Paul Keating, *The Prime Minister* by Bryan Westwood, won the Archibald Prize for portraiture.

In 1994, two film comedies, *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* and *Muriel's Wedding*, were released.

In 1995, the teenage Newcastle rock group Silverchair released their debut album *Frogstomp*.

	<p>In 1996, the NSW government gave Rupert Murdoch's Fox Studios permission to develop Fox Studios Australia at the Sydney Showground. The studio opened in 1999.</p>
<p><b>Sport</b></p>	<p>In 1992, Australia came ninth in the Barcelona Olympic medal tally. Australia won gold across a range of events including swimming. Kieren Perkins broke his own world record for the 1,500-metre freestyle. Australia won rowing gold medals for the men's coxless four (the 'awesome foursome') and the men's double sculls. Other sports to win gold included kayaking, cycling and equestrian events.</p> <p>In 1993, the Ashes test against England featured the extraordinary spin bowling of Shane Warne. He bowled his first ball as a perfect leg break, taking the wicket of the captain of the English team, Mike Gatting. This ball became known as 'the ball of the century'. Warne's introduction to international cricket launched a new era of spin bowling.</p> <p>In 1994, at the Commonwealth Games in Canada, Australia won the most medals of any nation. Cathy Freeman was the first Indigenous Australian athlete to win a track event, winning the 200 metres and 400 metres sprints. She ran her victory lap holding both the Australian and the Aboriginal flags.</p> <p>In 1997 and 1998, Pat Rafter won the US Open Tennis grand slam tournament.</p>

## Science and Technology

### Advances and problems

In 1990, an ocean-going wave-piercing catamaran, designed in Sydney and built in Hobart, broke the New York–London passenger vessel record when it made the crossing in 3 days, 7 hours and 54 minutes.

In 1993, an Adelaide company gained a patent for a genetically engineered pig.

In July 1993, phone numbers throughout Australia began converting from seven- to eight-digit numbers.

In 1996, Professor Peter Doherty shared the Nobel prize for medicine for his work in discovering how the immune system recognises virus-infected cells.

In September 1998, an explosion at Victoria's main gas plant near Sale in Gippsland cut gas supplies to most of the state for two weeks.

In September 1998, the largest recorded ozone hole over the southern hemisphere left more than 26 million square km of the planet unprotected from the Sun's ultraviolet rays.

In 1994, the 24-hour ABC news service NewsRadio began operating.

### Aurora solar racing car

In 1998, the Aurora solar car set a world record speed of 100.9 km/h over 1 hour, running on commercial solar cells and lead-acid batteries, from Hay to Balranald. The following year, the Aurora solar car became the first Australian entry to win the World Solar Challenge race from Darwin to Adelaide. Designed and built by the Aurora Vehicle Association and RMIT University in Melbourne, it beat 42 other contestants, completing the distance in 41 hours and 6 minutes at an average speed of 73 km/h.

The non-profit Aurora Vehicle Association has gone on to become one of the most successful solar car racing teams in the world.

### Sydney Harbour Tunnel

The Sydney Harbour Tunnel was a four-year construction project begun in January 1988 and completed in August 1992. At 2.8 km in length, it runs 25 metres below sea level. The main underwater section is a central immersed tube structure 960 metres long. It is made from eight precast concrete units, which were cast at Port Kembla and towed to Sydney Harbour.

The tunnel was built with the intention of easing the traffic congestion on the Sydney Harbour Bridge. The bridge was built in the 1920s and early 1930s, and since that time the amount of road traffic has increased exponentially. The tunnel cost an estimated \$55.25 million to build, and currently conveys an average of 86,800 vehicles beneath Port Jackson each day.