

Eddie Mabo

By Evan Buswell

Eddie Mabo is a proud Meriam Aboriginal man. Eddie is known for being an activist for Aboriginal's and other peoples rights. He was born on the 29th of June 1936 on the island of Mer (Murray Island). Eddie became an activist because he had a good education and wanted to help his race and other Black people.

Eddie Mabo was a very enthusiastic kid when he was young who liked to listen about his culture. Eddie grew up as the fourth child of Robert Zesou Sambo and Poipe Sambo Mabo, his Mum died shortly after his birth, and he was adopted by his Uncle Benny and Aunty Maigo Mabo in line with Islander custom. Eddie then moved to Townsville Queensland in the 1950s, that same year he met and married Bonita Neehow. Originally called Eddie Koiki Sambo worked on the pearling boats on the beaches of Townsville he also cut cane and was a railway fettler. Eddie then in 1973, became co-founder and director of the Townsville Black community school — one of the first in Australia.

Eddie started university in 1981 at James Cook University. Eddie was known at a youthful age to have a talent in art and acting so he went to Tagai state college and learnt English and got good and fluent at it. Eddie at the time had a teacher called Bob Miles specially helping him get better at English but at the same time Eddie was teaching Bob Miles Meriam

(Eddie's main language). Bob Miles saw potential in Eddie, so he stressed the importance of learning for Eddie's future involvement in mainland culture. Eddie was doing well at school until he was caught drinking alcohol and was put in exile for ten months.

When Eddie was exiled, he went to Townsville, and he got so far from being exiled. In 1992 Eddie died at age 55 from lung cancer and is being commemorated long after his death it is amazing how far he got after his mistake. In 1992 after his death, he was awarded the Australian Human Rights Medal along with his fellow plaintiffs 'in recognition of their long and determined battle to gain justice for their people'. In 1993 he was voted as Australian of the Year by the *Australian* newspaper (not to be confused with the Australian Government's Australian of the Year Awards). In 2008 he got the James Cook University library was named in his honour. In 2012 the Australian Broadcasting Corporation aired *Mabo: the movie*, a documentary drama based on his life. Mabo day is now celebrated on the 3rd of June each year to commemorate his courageous efforts to overturn the fiction of terra nullius.

Eddie has a good legacy that he has left us to remember him through. Eddie has left us with Mabo day to celebrate and commemorate his life and how he changed Aboriginals' life for the better. Many people on Murray Island still try to keep a strong connection to the land and try to learn the ways of the Meriam culture to keep Eddie's way going long after his death. Eddie still has lots of places around Australia to commemorate his death and to celebrate his old life. Eddie

has the James Cook University's library named after him since that was the university he went to. He also has a movie all about his life and achievements made in recognition of his life called Mabo.