

I came in contact with Tom in 1996 at a common friend's home and this acquaintance resulted in more professional dialogue and ultimately leading to me joining the then AIEF. He transformed a hard core academics to an education bureaucrat something that I never wanted to be. But it is Tom who has the power to change minds through a constructive dialogue.

It is this part of his personality that has won him laurels all around the world particularly when he takes cause of aboriginal community.

Let me also narrate some of the initiatives that Tom may not remember but those created a different climate for Australian education and training industry. Of course formation of AAERI was the most important to bring ethics to student recruitment processes. The others included formation of AIGA – Association of Indian graduates from Australia, launch of its newsletter AIGAN, formation of Indian association for study of Australia, introduction of Australian literature course at IGNOU, introduction of a course on Australian government and politics again at IGNOU. And probably the most challenging step was to launch a quarterly journal education dialogue that provided a platform to look at policy initiatives very critically in Australia and India.

Professor Thomas Edwin "Tom" Calma, was born in [Darwin, Northern Territory](#). He is an [Australian Aboriginal elder](#) of the [Kungarakan](#) people and member of the Iwaidja group. A human rights and social justice campaigner, he is the sixth [Chancellor](#) of the [University of Canberra](#), a post held since January 2014. Tom is the first Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander man to hold the position of Chancellor of any Australian university. [Pat O'Shane](#) was the first aboriginal woman to be appointed as Chancellor.

As a young man, Tom completed his Associate Diploma of Social Work at the South Australian Institute of Technology and began working for the Australian Government in various roles. In 1980 he joined the then Darwin Community College, one of the predecessor institutions of Charles Darwin University, as a lecturer in the Aboriginal Task Force program. By 1981 he was coordinator of the program and then Head of the academic department. At the time Tom was the first Indigenous Australian appointed to a tenured position at a post-secondary education institution in the Northern Territory and one of the first nationally. In 1986 he rejoined the Australian Government as the Director of the Aboriginal Employment and Training Branch in the Department of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs based in Darwin. Following a transfer to Canberra, he became the Executive Officer to the Secretary of the Department of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs. In this role he chaired and undertook a national review of Aboriginal Education Units in the department.

Between 1995 and 1998 he was Counsellor Education and Training in India and from 1998 to 2002 he held the same position in Vietnam.

In 2003, he served as Senior Adviser for Indigenous Affairs to the Honourable [Philip Ruddock](#) in his capacity as the Minister of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs.

He served as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner from 2004 to 2010 and as Race Discrimination Commissioner from 2004 until 2009 at the [Australian Human Rights Commission](#)

Since March 2010 he has been the Federal Government appointed National Coordinator, Tackling Indigenous Smoking leading the fight against tobacco use in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

In 2007 Tom was named by the Bulletin Magazine as the Most Influential Indigenous Person in Australia and in 2008 he received an award from GQ Magazine after being named GQ Magazine's 2008 Man of Inspiration for his work in Indigenous Affairs.

Tom was appointed to [Order of Australia](#); Officer of the General Division in 2012 in recognition of his work as an inspirational advocate for human rights and social justice and distinguished service to the Indigenous community. He was named as 2013 [ACT Australian of the Year](#).

His 2005 Social Justice Report – focusing on Indigenous health equality – was the catalyst for the Close the Gap campaign. The Close the Gap Campaign has effectively brought national attention to achieving health equality for Indigenous people by 2030

On 30 June 2016, outgoing United States Ambassador to Australia John Berry honoured Tom at an event to mark the 240th anniversary of American independence by presenting him with an American flag — which had been flying over the Martin Luther King memorial in Washington DC — at the Yarralumla embassy.

Ambassador Berry said and I quote “Your voice echoes that of the father of the American civil rights movement Dr Martin Luther King Jr — a man who held up a mirror to America and asked our country to live its values”.