

Charles Nelson Perkins

Indigenous leader and public administrator (1936–2000)

Charles (Charlie) Perkins was born at the Alice Springs Telegraph Station Aboriginal Reserve in the Northern Territory in 1936. His parents were Arrente and Kalkadoon people. Removed from the Reserve at the age of 10 he was sent to a home for boys in Adelaide where he completed his schooling. He qualified as a fitter and turner in 1952. A talented soccer player, Perkins played as a professional with English club, Everton, and on his return to Australia with Adelaide Croatian and Sydney club, Pan-Hellenic.

While studying at the Sydney University, Perkins became increasingly active in Indigenous rights issues. In 1965 he gained notoriety by leading a group of fellow students on the Freedom Ride – a tour of rural New South Wales centres to highlight the discrimination that existed for Indigenous people in many country towns.

Perkins joined the Commonwealth Office of Aboriginal Affairs in 1969. His career grew with the Commonwealth's increasing role in Indigenous issues. By 1984 he was Secretary of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. A well-known national figure who often attracted controversy, Perkins resigned his post in 1988 after a clash with his Minister over financial mismanagement (the allegations were later dismissed).

In his later years Perkins returned to live in Alice Springs. He was elected to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) in 1993 and served as Deputy Chairman in 1994–95. He also served as a mentor to several of Australia's Aboriginal athletes.

Records relating to Charles Perkins held by the National Archives

The National Archives holds many records relating to Charles Perkins, and in particular his years as a government employee. You can [search the collection](#) to identify records. Examples of the types of records held are listed in the tables below.

Canberra

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Enquiry by Mr Charles Perkins regarding a position with the Department of Territories</u>	1961–62	A452, 1961/761
<u>Familiarisation visit to the Northern Territory by Charles Perkins prior to his visit overseas</u>	1967	A452, NT1967/2371
<u>Special Overseas Visits Fund – visits abroad – Charles Perkins</u>	1967–68	A1838, 574/3/91
<u>Charles Perkins – representations on policy and administration in Aboriginal Affairs</u>	1971	A463, 1971/1328
<u>United Nations – human rights – Australian Aboriginals and other minorities including Charles Perkins</u>	1971–77	A1838, 929/5/3 part 4

Sydney

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Interview with Charles Perkins re his life and his autobiography [ABC Radio sound recording]</u>	1991	C100, 92/7/167

Perth

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Resource information database sheets (Broome) – media – C Perkins 'Charles Perkins on Beckers Broadside, ABC Radio'</u>	1989	D4152, 768

Darwin

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Charles (Charlie) Perkins</u>	1961–62	D4082, WB86
<u>Request for Kormilda College teaching assistants – for public discussion with Mr Charles Perkins</u>	1968	F1, 1968/4700
<u>Enquiry by C Perkins – re assistance in native welfare</u>	1961–73	F1, 1973/461

Photographic records

The National Archives also holds many photographs of Charles Perkins taken by the former Australian News and Information Bureau (later the Australian Overseas Information Service). [Search the collection](#) using the keyword term 'charles perkins' to identify relevant photographs. Some examples are listed below.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are advised that records in the National Archives collection may include the names and images of Indigenous Australians, some of whom are now deceased.

Photographic records relating to Charles Perkins

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Charles Perkins speaking at Aboriginal demonstration outside Parliament House during Queen's visit, 6 March 1974</u>	1974	A6135, K7/3/74/12
<u>Personalities – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander – Charles Perkins, Department of Aboriginal Affairs</u>	1974	A8739, A16/7/74/3
<u>Winners of shield and Charles Perkins, Rugby League Carnival, Cairns</u>	1980	A8598, AK31/1/80/151
<u>Personalities – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander – Charles Perkins, Secretary Department of Aboriginal Affairs at Aboriginal Embassy Anniversary</u>	1982	A6135, K29/1/82/35
<u>Personalities – Bob Hawke – with Clyde Holding and Charles Perkins</u>	1984	A6180, 5/4/84/9

Other sources

A collection of personal records of Charles Perkins is held by the National Library of Australia.