



THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF
**THE POLISH COMMUNITY
COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA**

*... loyal to Australia as citizens of this country yet
mindful of their origins and cultural traditions ...*

1951–2011

The establishment of the Council of Polish Organisations in Australia, in 1951, should be seen as the most significant organisational achievement of the Polish community in Australia.

It was formed as a result of the influx of Polish-born immigrants to Australia in the aftermath of World War II, when the Australian Government launched a large-scale immigration program under the slogan of "populate or perish".

Between 1945 and 1954 Polish immigrants represented a high proportion of the 170,700 refugees who arrived in Australia from Europe under the International Refugee Organisation (IRO) program.

According to the 1947 census, the number of Australian residents who were born in Poland was 6,573. Between 1947 and 1954, the number of Polish born residents increased to 56,594.

Poles began setting up community and veteran organisations in states and territories and it was apparent there was a need for a coordinating body. A temporary representative body was established in the form of the Congress of Organisations representing the Polish community in Australia. The Congress convened on January 6–7, 1950 under the chairmanship of the former Polish Ambassador Mr Alfred Poniński and adopted the following declaration:

The Council of Polish Organisations in Australia is an expression of independent Polish organisations, which object to Poland being a Soviet satellite state. Organisations which believe in the full sovereignty of the Polish State and which recognize the President and the Polish government-in-exile in London as the sole legitimate and legal authority of the Polish Nation.



1st Congress, Council of Polish Organisations in Australia, 1951

Standing from left: S. Wolek, S. Maruszewski, F. Skowroński, A. Czajkowski, B. Korpowski, T. Bielski, S. Łuk-Kozika, T. Szustkiewicz, J. Dunin-Karwicki, J. Zanoziński, Fr. F. Arciszewski, unknown. Middle row from left: J. Żongółłowicz, A. Jarecki, Dr. E. Parnes, W. Miller, S. Gruszka, A. Poniński, A. Kondratowicz, Fr. K. Trzeciak, J. Rakowski. Front row from left: R. Krygier, B. Kurnatowski, S. Nowakowski, W. Mularczyk, Dr Z. Przybyłkiewicz, Z. Święcicki, unknown, unknown, M. Strumillo, unknown.



Alfred Poniński

On March 23, 1951 the Council formed an Executive Committee with Alfred Poniński as President. In May 1951 the Council established the Polish Community Fund. Three years later General Juliusz Kleeberg became the next President. The Council pledged to cooperate more broadly with Australian organisations.

General Kleeberg told Prime Minister Robert Menzies in Sydney in 1954:

I want Polonia [Poles living abroad] to be loyal to Australia as citizens of this country yet mindful of their origins and cultural traditions.

During the sixty years of its existence the Council has played an active role voicing opinions of the Polish community in Australia, lobbying and providing assistance to Poles in need.

In the aftermath of political events in Poland in October 1956, migration issues were discussed by the Executive Committee with the Australian government. The Council officially requested Prime Minister Menzies to condemn the communist government in Poland.

In 1957 the Polish community in Australia organised assistance in the re-settlement of post-1956 Polish repatriates from the Soviet Union. The Council received a letter from the Roman Catholic Primate of Poland Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński expressing gratitude for the help provided.

In the 1960's the Council established closer links with other Polish organisations in the free world.

As a result of easing of restrictions on communications with Poland, the Council undertook to fight the intensified infiltration of the Polish community in Australia by the Polish communist government which conducted a campaign to undermine the authority of people of influence among the Polish migrants and by this means tried to disrupt the Polish organisations "from within". At the 12th Congress General Kleeberg acknowledged that the Polish government "succeeded to a remarkable degree in preventing Polish organisations from forming a united independent front".

The Executive Committee condemned the repressions by the Polish communist government against the students and intellectuals in the aftermath of the March 1968 events. It also issued a protest over the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact members in August 1968.

Mr Andrzej Raciński was elected President on the sudden death of General Kleeberg which caused some disruption to the Council's activities. During his presidency the Council organised the collection of donations following the tragic events of December 1970 in the Polish shipyards. In addition various other protests were organised.

It also lobbied Australian politicians to condemn the 1940 Katyn Forest massacre of approx. 22,000 Polish officers. Letters designed to raise awareness in Australia of this crime were sent in August 1971.

During 1975–1976 the Council supported the *Letter of 59* – an open letter by 59 Polish intellectuals protesting against the proposed changes to the Constitution of the People's Republic of Poland which wanted to affirm the *steering role of the Party in the nation, the socialist character of the nation, the permanent and unbreakable alliance with the Soviet Union*, and crucially *the government's obligation to respect the rights of the citizens* being conditional only, and *dependent on the citizens fulfilling their obligations towards the country*.

The letter was translated into English and widely distributed to Australian authorities at all levels of government and to the media. The Council simultaneously organised protest actions in solidarity with the signatories of the letter.

During the presidency of Mr Krzysztof Łańcucki the Council set up the Australian National Committee for Relief to Poland whose patron was Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser and Frank Galbally QC as its Chair. In 1981 the Help Poland Live Appeal collected \$2.3 million including \$1 million donated by the Australian government.

In the early 1980's, when the "Solidarity" movement was formed, the Council played a vital role in organizing political and economic support to back the Polish people in their struggle for sovereignty and democracy. It also organised support for refugees who encountered difficulties settling in Australia.

The most important event for the Polish community in Australia was the visit by Pope John Paul II in November 1986. A meeting with him at the Melbourne Cricket Ground was attended by 50,000 Poles who travelled from all parts of Australia.

To celebrate the 200th anniversary of Australia, the Council erected a monument in Cooma, designed by Polish artist Stanisław Ostoja-Kotkowski, to honor Tadeusz Kościuszko Poland's hero and statesman whose name was given to Mount Kosciuszko.

The election of the President and government in Poland's free, democratic elections in 1990 was a political and moral victory for all Polish citizens in Poland and abroad including those in Australia.

The Polish Community Council of Australia was a major sponsor of the 1st Australian International Chopin Competition of Australia in May 2011 in Canberra.

The Polish Community Council in Australia is proud of its contribution in maintaining the Polish national spirit among the 163,800 Poles in Australia.

The current members of the Polish Community Council of Australia are: Andrew Alwast OAM, President; Ita Szymańska, Vice-President; Wanda Horky, Secretary; Andrew Wojkowski, Treasurer; Dr Halina Zobel-Zubrzycka, Second Secretary (Polish) and Publicity Officer; Paweł Potapowicz, Second Treasurer; Andrew Zawartko, Public Officer; Dr Wiesław Kaczmarek, Webmaster; Jerzy Krajewski [NSW]; Leszek Wikarjusz [Qld]; Father Tadeusz Przybylak, representing Fr. Wiesław Słowik Rector of the Polish Catholic Mission in Australia and NZ; Halina Szunejko OAM, President, Education Commission of the Polish community of Australia.

Dr Bogumiła Żongolłowicz. Translated by Dr Halina Zobel-Zubrzycka. Edited by Wanda Horky. Partly based on the article Działalność Polonii australijskiej na rzecz niepodległości Polski (1945–1990) by Zdzisław Derwiński. Design and layout Rosanna Horn.

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