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The Peacemaker

He's lived through very difficult times but his life is about social justice. And peace for everyone really. Linda Burney, Federal Labor Member of Parliament

He had that capacity to have politicians come to the table. He had that capacity to sit them down and they'd listen. Michael Anderson, Aboriginal Embassy founder and friend.

We were hoping to achieve the freedom of our people in Australia.
Pastor Ossie Cruse

Pastor Ossie Cruse has been a driving force of the Aboriginal rights movement on the world stage yet some of his most influential work is happening right now in his hometown of Eden, on the south coast of NSW.

At 83, Ossie Cruse, or 'Uncle Ossie' as he is more commonly known, is seeing a long-held dream come to fruition – the re-establishment of an ancient Aboriginal pathway that was lost for hundreds of years. Known as the Bundian Way, it stretches for about 360 kilometres from the heights of the Snowy Mountains to the coast at Eden.

"It was here that Aboriginal people first handed out the hand of friendship to non-Aboriginal people and said come, we'll show you the safest way up to the high country," Uncle Ossie Cruse says.

He describes it as a shared pathway and a place that will bring divided cultures together in reconciliation – something Uncle Ossie Cruse has been fighting for his whole life.

With only a primary school education and having lived as an itinerant worker for years, Ossie Cruse stepped into the world of politics after the 1967 referendum, which saw Indigenous Australians counted in the census for the first time.

"We needed leadership and people like Ossie Cruse stood up and paved the way for many of us young ones," says Michael Anderson, founder of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy.

While many Aboriginal activists took to the streets in protest, Ossie Cruse worked behind the scenes, a quiet but persistent negotiator, gently persuading politicians to recognise the cause of his people.

Decades on, Uncle Ossie Cruse continues to fight for his people, attending the landmark Constitutional Convention at Uluru in May.

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