

Naba Guatarè

Traditional Meriam Sep Segur (Murray Island Sit Down Dance)
Performed by Noel Zaro OAM, Kay Zaro OAM, Caleb Zaro, Jennayah Zaro & the Gondwana
Indigenous Children's Choir

Project: Let's Sing 2025

The history of the song, as told to ABC Education by Noel Zaro AOM.

This is a story song and sit down dance from the island of "Mer" (Murray Island) in the Eastern Torres Strait.

Torres Strait History

In the old days, there was a massive pearl shell boom in the Torres Strait. Pearl shells and trochus shells were in big demand all over the world. These shells were used to make jewellery, ornaments, female hair combs, shiny buttons for uniforms, and clothing. Today, these items are made from plastic.

The call-out "Oisa, oisa" was introduced by the Japanese deck crews when pulling up their boat anchor and full bags of pearl shells to the surface from the deep sea.

The call-out "Oisa, oisa" would keep the deck crew in one motion as they pulled up to the ocean surface bags full of pearl shells, the boat's anchor, and also the diver who was way down below, picking up the pearl shells.

Pronunciation guide

Naba Guatarè is pronounced NABA GWA-TAR-RÈ

To help pronounce the Meriam Mir (Murray Island language) correctly, here is the Meriam Mir vowels and how we pronounce them. This will help pronounce the Meriam Wed (song words) correctly.

A – AH	Ah, as in a bove, a round
E – EH	E, as in e lephant, e gg
I – EE	EE, as in I ran, I raq, i rregular
O – OH	OH, as in o ctopus, O ctober
U – OO	OO, as in u te, cue , or the call of an owl... "oo, oo, oo"

LYRICS

LAGÈR MUKUB DABOR-A-RÈ
KO-MI NABA GUATAR-È

*Team members tie the broken rope into a knot
Let us pull the rope again*

NABA GUATARÈ
NABA GUATARÈ
LAGÈR IKO-MI
NABA GUATARÈ
DABOR-A-RÈ

*Pull
Pull
The rope we grab together
Pull
The tension of opposing teams pulling the rope, the
rope becomes very tight*

NABA KÈS-MÈR-RÈ
NABA TI-ÈG-GÈ
LAGÈR MUKUB DABOR-A-RÈ
KO-MI NABA GUATAR-È

*The rope breaks in half because of the tight tension
Both teams place their ropes to the ground
Team members tie the broken rope into a knot
Let us pull the rope again*

OISA! OISA! MMMMMMM

NABA GUATARÈ
NABA GUATARÈ
LAGÈR IKO-MI
NABA GUATARÈ
DABOR-A-RÈ

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