

FAQs on January 26

A guide for the community



Moreland
City Council

Why is Moreland Council changing the way it marks January 26?

We are changing the way we mark January 26 out of respect for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

To have a truly inclusive national celebration we need to find a day which includes, honours and celebrates the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who have inhabited this land for 60,000 plus years prior to European settlement.

What did Council base this decision on?

Celebrations held on January 26 are known to have a negative impact on many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, who experience the day as a sad and painful day.

Council's decision was based on consultation with the Moreland Reconciliation Advisory Committee, consultation with other local councils and their respective Aboriginal advisory committee members, and community organisations.

There is a visible groundswell of support for change, demonstrated by the estimated 50,000 Melburnians – Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal – who took to the streets on 26 January 2017.

Council is committed to engaging with Moreland's diverse community – including established and newly arrived communities – to raise community awareness and understanding about the campaign to change the date of Australia day.

On 13 September 2017 Moreland City Councillors passed a motion to:

- Acknowledge that January 26 marks the beginning of the British invasion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lands and oppression of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and this therefore not an appropriate date for the inclusive national celebration.
- Acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people never ceded sovereignty of their lands and have continuously cared for their country for over 60,000 years, as the world's oldest living culture.
- Acknowledge the first Day of Mourning was held on January 26 1938, being the 150th anniversary of the British invasion. The day was attended by Indigenous Australians and non-Indigenous supporters in protest of the national holiday and the 'callous treatment' of Aboriginal people and continues to be held annually.

Does this mean that Moreland Council is anti-Australia Day?

We are not anti-Australia Day, nor opposed to the celebration of national identity. We are opposed to celebrating our national identity on January 26, a day which causes distress to many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Will the Mayor, Councillors and staff of Moreland Council still take a public holiday on January 26?

As elected representatives, the Mayor and Councillors work every day for the Moreland community, including public holidays.

January 26 remains a public holiday, and Council's customer services centres and libraries will be closed. Bin collections will take place as normal and Active Moreland centres will be open 8 am - 6 pm.

Will I lose my public holiday on January 26?

No, Moreland City Council is not seeking to take away any public holidays. We are simply looking for a more culturally respectful date to mark the celebration of our country.

Why doesn't Council stick to 'rates, roads and rubbish'?

Council has a responsibility to advocate on behalf of its community, as well as deliver a range of essential services.

Since the Local Government Act 1989 (Vic) was passed 30 years ago, the role of local councils has grown to do more for local communities, including "advocating the interests of the local community to other communities and governments".

Similarly to Yarra, Port Philip and Darebin Councils, many in our local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community have told us that January 26 celebrations have a significant negative impact on their health and wellbeing. As a Council, we have a legislative responsibility to show leadership and advocate on their behalf.

As important as our advocacy work is, we are equally committed to delivering a range of everyday services and programs.

This is a Federal Government issue, why is Moreland Council getting involved?

We are getting involved because this is a local issue as much as it is a national one. The way we mark January 26 has a significant negative impact on many in our local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

We have a long-standing and collaborative relationship with our local Aboriginal community and have been working closely with the Traditional Owners the land, the Wurundjeri People.

But Australia Day has always been on January 26 – it's a tradition.

Australia Day only became a national public holiday celebrated by all states and territories in 1994.

The first Day of Mourning was held on January 26 1938, being the 150th anniversary of the British invasion. The day was attended by Indigenous Australians and non-Indigenous supporters in protest of the 'callous treatment' of Aboriginal people and continues to be held annually.

How much will it cost for you to implement these changes?

The costs for carrying out these changes are minimal. All recommendations can easily be completed within existing budgets.

Will Moreland Council be cancelling Australia Day celebrations?

In 2015 Moreland Council decided to recognise that 26 January is not an appropriate day to celebrate the Moreland Awards and moved the annual community awards from 26 January to a day in October.

We will continue holding citizenship ceremonies on January 26, which will be one of 11 ceremonies that are held throughout the year.

Can Moreland residents still celebrate January 26?

The Moreland community is welcome to celebrate on January 26 as they choose.

Moreland City Council encourages people to reflect about what this date means in the history of our nation and its effect on our Aboriginal community.

Aren't there already dates that celebrate Aboriginal culture and history?

While Australia has significant days a year that recognise and celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island culture, (such as National Sorry day and Reconciliation week) these days are not strictly days of celebration neither are they exclusive.

None of them are national holidays. These days are a celebration of the survival of Aboriginal culture within a framework of reflection, recognition and redressing the loss and dispossession of Aboriginal peoples. These days are inclusive of all Australians as they aim to build partnerships and alliances between Indigenous Australians and all Australians who are committed to social justice.