

January 26 in Moreland: Finding a date that is inclusive of everyone in our community

In September 2017, Moreland City Council resolved to no longer refer to January 26 as Australia Day. Council believes that our celebration of national identity should be held on a date that is inclusive of everyone in our community.

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.

Sue Lopez Atkinson and Liz Phillips are members of the Moreland Reconciliation Working Group and share their views about changing the date.

As Aboriginal women we have long engaged in activism around January 26th as Australia's national day. Objections to celebrating this date are not new, with the first Day of Mourning protest held in 1938 being the 150th anniversary of the British invasion.

Objections to changing the date in our opinion have been mired in ignorance.

Holding Australia Day on January 26th is not inclusive of all Australians as a day of Celebration as it not only overlooks its significance to Aboriginal people as the date when a brutal dispossession began, it positions this dispossession as the primary source of national pride and identity.

In view of this we are asking does January 26th seriously qualify as Australia Day?

One of the arguments¹ that we have encountered in response to the debate is that Australia has 22 days a year that exclusively celebrate Aboriginal culture (including National Sorry day and Reconciliation week) yet one day a year when we can all celebrate our great nation is a problem.

But 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.

Many alternative dates to 26 January have been put forward linked to a variety of events. However we suggest a date disconnected to an event in the last 232 years of Australian history.

A day that marks the changing of the seasons such as the first day of spring when the wattle comes into bloom may more appropriate and inclusive. On this day we could all celebrate our country and make a renewal of our commitment to care for the land and waterways as our ancestors did for over 40,000 years.

This could be a date that is more about hope and unifying rather than a date marked by division and despair.

Sue Atkinson and Liz Phillips

¹ originally posted by Stand Up for Australia Melbourne

NOTICES OF MOTION:

NOM55/17 SUPPORTING THE CAMPAIGN TO CHANGE THE DATE OF AUSTRALIA DAY
(D17/326827) September 2017