

2017/01: Should Australia change the date of Australia Day?

What they said...

'We can't reasonably expect indigenous Australians to "draw that line in history" [between past wrongs and present reality] while we continue to celebrate on a day which marks the beginning of their dispossession and the loss of their cultural control of this land'

Former federal Resources and Science Minister, Ian Macfarlane

'The shire needs to retract what it's doing. It's not in line with community attitudes. I strongly condemn them for this whole thing. They've really upset a lot of people and are not representing the ratepayers. Australia Day is Australia Day'

Indigenous spokesperson, Robert Isaacs, criticising Freemantle's attempt to shift the date of Australia Day

The issue at a glance

On August 25, 2016, the Freemantle Council announced that the Western Australian city would no longer hold its Australia Day celebrations on January 26th. The change was made out of respect for the feelings of Indigenous Australians, many of whom do not find the date a reason for celebration as it coincides with the initial dispossession of their ancestors.

The Council subsequently announced that it would instead celebrate on January 28th with an event called 'One Day in Fremantle'. Citizenship ceremonies were also intended to be held on January 28th rather than the usual January 26th. On December 5, 2016, the federal Government intervened and required Freemantle to hold its citizenship ceremonies on January 26th. The assistant immigration minister, Alex Hawke, claimed that holding citizenship ceremonies on January 28 would give an anti-Australia Day message. The Minister added, 'It's really important ... we've got hundreds of councils administering this around the country ... that they don't get the idea they can use citizenship as a political football.' In the event, Freemantle held its citizenship ceremonies on January 26th and its day of public celebration on January 28th. Many Freemantle traders conducted their own 'Australia Day' celebrations on January 26th to coincide with the public holiday.

These developments served to accentuate the debate surrounding the suitability of the current date of Australia's national day. This is a dispute which predates the Australia-wide adoption of January 26th as Australia Day in 1994.

Background

(The material below is an abbreviated version of a Wikipedia entry titled 'Australia Day'. The full entry can be found at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australia_Day)

Australia Day is the official national day of Australia. Celebrated annually on 26 January, it marks the anniversary of the 1788 arrival of the First Fleet of British Ships at Port Jackson, New South Wales, and the raising of the Flag of Great Britain at Sydney Cove by Governor Arthur Phillip.

In present-day Australia, celebrations reflect the diverse society and landscape of the nation, and are marked by community and family events, reflections on Australian history, official community awards, and citizenship ceremonies welcoming new members of the Australian community.

The meaning and significance of Australia Day has evolved over time. Unofficially, or historically, the date has also been variously named 'Anniversary Day', 'Foundation Day', and 'ANA Day'. 26 January 1788 marked the proclamation of British sovereignty over the eastern seaboard of Australia (then known as New Holland). Although it was not known as Australia Day until over a century later, records of celebrations on 26 January date back to 1808, with the first official celebration of the formation of New South Wales held in 1818. On New Year's Day 1901, the British colonies of Australia formed a Federation, marking the birth of modern Australia. A national day of unity and celebration was looked for. It was not until 1935 that all Australian states and territories had adopted use of the term 'Australia Day' to mark the date, and not until 1994 that the date was consistently marked by a public holiday on that day by all states and territories.

In contemporary Australia, the holiday is marked by the presentation of the Australian of the Year Awards on Australia Day Eve, announcement of the Australia Day Honours list and addresses from the Governor-General and the Prime Minister. It is an official public holiday in every state and territory of Australia, unless it falls on a weekend in which case the following Monday becomes a public holiday instead. With community festivals, concerts and citizenship ceremonies, the day is celebrated in large and small communities and cities around the nation. Australia Day has become the biggest annual civic event in Australia.

Some Indigenous Australian events are now included. However, since at least 1938 Australia Day has also been marked by various groups including Indigenous Australians and people sympathetic to their cause mourning what they see as the invasion of their land by Europeans, and protesting its celebration as a national holiday. These groups sometimes refer to 26 January as 'Invasion Day' or 'Survival Day' and advocate that the date should be changed.

Internet information

On January 30, 2017, Herald Sun commentator Andrew Bolt wrote a comment titled 'ABC claims push building for changing the date of Australia Day'

Bolt gives seven reasons why it would not be appropriate to change the date of the Australia Day celebrations.

The full text of this comment can be found at <http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/opinion/andrew-bolt/abc-claims->

[push-building-for-changing-the-date-of-australia-day/news-story/bf0b75524e50cc7ee9578df96139b6b2](https://www.mamamia.com.au/news-story/bf0b75524e50cc7ee9578df96139b6b2)

On January 28, 2017, Mamamia published a comment by Maggie Kelly titled 'Aboriginal leader Jacinta Price: "Changing the date of Australia Day is pointless"'. The comment gives the views of Price and the author both of whom argue that a date change would be empty symbolism.

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.mamamia.com.au/jacinta-price-on-australia-day/>

On January 27, 2017, com.news.au published a comment by Joe Hildebrand titled 'Changing the date of Australia Day won't change our past'

The comment argues that a change of date for Australia's national day will not alter the historical realities which have shaped the country.

The full text of the article can be accessed at <http://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/real-life/news-life/changing-the-date-of-australia-day-wont-change-our-past-says-joe-hildebrand/news-story/d9a6ecdf0c2a85a77d227dcc6f79ce8>

On January 26, 2017, former Resources and Science minister Ian Macfarlane speaking at the Australian Unity Great Australia Day Breakfast 2017 urged that the Date of Australia Day be changed from January 26 to March 1 out of consideration for the sensitivities of Indigenous Australians who find the current date offensive.

The full text of Macfarlane's remarks can be found at https://www.qrc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Ian-Macfarlane_AustraliaDay.pdf

On January 26, 2017, the United States Cable News Network (CNN) published an analysis of the Australia Day debate. The article is titled 'Why some Australians want to move their controversial national day.' It gives a history of the day and an overview of the debate surrounding it.

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.cbs5az.com/story/34342246/why-some-australians-want-to-move-their-controversial-national-day>

On January 26, 2017, The Guardian published an editorial titled 'The Guardian view on Australia Day: change the date' The editorial tracks the history of the day and some of the debate around it; while arguing the date should be changed.

The full text of this opinion can be accessed at <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/jan/25/the-guardian-view-on-australia-day-change-the-date>

On January 26, 2017, The Armidale Express published a news report titled 'Barnaby Joyce launches extraordinary attack on people who want to move Australia Day'.

The report gives a range of views from those of Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce, who favour the retention of January 26, to former Resources and Science minister Ian Macfarlane, who argue that the day should be changed.

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.armidaleexpress.com.au/story/4428186/barnaby-joyce-launches-extraordinary-attack-on-people-who-want-to-move-australia-day/?cs=7>

On January 25, 2017, The Daily Telegraph published a comment by Kevin Donnelly, a Senior Research Fellow at the Australian Catholic University and author of The Culture of Freedom. The opinion piece is titled 'January 26 is Australia Day. Stop trying to change it'

Donnelly argues for the importance of the British political and cultural legacy in Australia and for the suitability of January 26 as a day to commemorate this.

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/rendezview/january-26-is-australia-day-stop-trying-to-change-it/news-story/af8392591fa8610e13263f5bf73a3d0e>

On January 25, 2017, The Sydney Morning Herald published a comment by RMIT University Adjunct Professor Stephen Alomes and historian of Australian nationalism and populism. The comment is titled 'We need to reinvent Australia Day - both its date and its character'. It argues for a change of date and a change in the mode of celebration of Australia to consciously include all elements of Australia's identity.

The full text of this article can be accessed at <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/we-need-to-reinvent-australia-day--both-its-date-and-its-character-20170124-gtxgiz.html>

On January 25, 2017, The Conversation published a comment by Anthony Dillon, a Lecturer in the Faculty of Health Sciences at the Australian Catholic University.

The opinion piece is titled 'Changing Australia Day is pointless - and there is much to celebrate'

The piece encourages readers to celebrate what has been achieved within Australia and suggests that changing the date of Australia would achieve no practical good.

The full text can be accessed at <https://theconversation.com/changing-australia-day-is-pointless-and-there-is-much-to-celebrate-71010>

On January 25, 2017, the ABC site Triple Hack published an analysis by James Purtill in which he gives an overview of the history of January 26 as Australia Day and of evolving attitudes toward the day and the date.

The full analysis can be accessed at <http://www.abc.net.au/triplej/programs/hack/what-would-it-take-to-change-the-date-of-australia-day/8209122>

On January 24, 2017, The Daily Telegraph published an opinion piece by Warren Mundine, AO and chair of the Yaabubiin Institute for Disruptive Thinking. The comment is titled 'We must stop celebrating Australia Day on January 26'. The comment gives a variety of reasons for changing the date.

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/rendezview/we-must-stop-celebrating-australia-day-on-january-26/news-story/36989400b8175992dddc98784358803b>

On January 21, 2017, The Sydney Morning Herald published a comment by Aravind Krishnan titled 'Seven reasons not to celebrate on January 26'.

The comment gives a range of reasons as to why January 26 is not a suitable date on which to celebrate Australia's national day.

The full text of these comments can be found at <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/seven-reasons-not-to-celebrate-on-january-26-20170120-gtvdxs.html>

On January 20, 2017, The Adelaide Advertiser published a background piece by Susan Johnson titled 'Why do we celebrate Australia Day on January 26?'

The analysis looked at the history of the day and of changing attitudes toward it.

The full text of this analysis can be accessed at <http://www.adelaidenow.com.au/news/national/why-do-we-celebrate-australia-day-on-january-26/news-story/190c714b177833de98f52821358df1b9>

On January 16, 2017, The Unshackled published a comment by Lance Thomas titled 'The Push to Destroy Australia Day'. Thomas argues that January 26 celebrates a valuable British legacy and that those who object to the date have exaggerated opinions fed by the media.

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.theunshackled.net/rundown/the-push-to-destroy-australia-day/>
<http://www.theunshackled.net/rundown/the-push-to-destroy-australia-day/http://www.theunshackled.net/rundown/the-push-to-destroy-australia-day/>

On November 29, 2016, The Advertiser published a comment by Indigenous reporter Douglas Smith titled 'Whatever you call it, Australia Day is our most divisive day'

The opinion piece explains why from an Indigenous perspective January 26 is an inappropriate date for a national celebration.

The full text of this comment can be accessed at <http://www.adelaidenow.com.au/news/opinion/douglas-smith-whatever-you-call-it-australia-day-is-our-most-divisive-day/news-story/9dc3eb3ae8f292c6f1b1a611ac88e545>

On November 28, 2016, The Guardian published a comment by Dom Knight titled 'Celebrating Australia Day on 26 January is like letting off party poppers at a memorial service'

Knight presents a range of reasons as to why the date is not appropriate for an Australian national celebration.

These arguments can be accessed at <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/nov/28/celebrating-australia-day-on-26-january-is-like-letting-off-party-poppers-at-a-memorial-service>

On January 28, 2016, The New Matilda published a comment by Max Chalmers titled 'January 26: Australia All Alone with a National Day That Celebrates Dispossession'

Chalmers argues that other nations tend to celebrate their independence rather than their dependence on their colonial heritage.

The full text can be accessed at <https://newmatilda.com/2016/01/28/january-26-australia-all-alone-with-a-national-day-that-celebrates-dispossession/>

On January 26, 2016, The New Matilda published an opinion piece by Chris Graham titled 'CHANGE THE DATE: Read This If You Want to Know Why Australia Day Is So Offensive'

The comment explains why Indigenous Australians find the current date offensive.

The full text can be accessed at <https://newmatilda.com/2016/01/26/change-the-date-read-this-if-you-want-to-know-why-australia-day-is-so-offensive-to-aboriginal-people/>

On January 14, 2014, The Conversation published a comment by Robin Tennant-Wood, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Business and Government, University of Canberra.

The point of view is titled 'Australia Day nationalism walks in the footsteps of ugly precedents'

Professor Tennant-Wood argues that the current Australia Day is becoming narrowly nationalistic.

The full text of this comment can be accessed at <https://theconversation.com/australia-day-nationalism-walks-in-the-footsteps-of-ugly-precedents-21951>

On January 12, 2014, The NT News published a comment by Patrick Carlyon titled 'For some, January 26 is a celebration of Australian intolerance'

The comment looks at attitudes for and against the current date and celebration and appears finally to recommend a more casual attitude and acceptance of the current date. The full text can be accessed at <http://www.ntnews.com.au/news/opinion/for-some-january-26-is-a-celebration-of-australian-intolerance/news-story/34d5fe4748da15154555d931976c9936>

On January 10, 2014, The Sydney Morning Herald published an article by Stephanie Anderson titled 'Australia Day T-shirts get thumbs down'

The report considers evidence that a narrow jingoism is becoming prevalent on Australia Day.

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.smh.com.au/national/australia-day-tshirts-get-thumbs-down-20140109-30kou.html>

On January 27, 2013, Benjamin Thomas Jones published a comment on his Internet site Thematic Musings. The comment is titled 'In defence of Australia Day: Keep the 26th of Jan!'

The opinion piece offers a variety of reasons as to why the current date should be retained.

The full text of this argument can be accessed at <http://benjaminthomasjones.com/?p=483>

On January 26, 2013, Independent Australia published a comment by David Donovan titled 'Why I'm not celebrating Australia Day'. The opinion piece expresses a number of reservations about the current date of the celebration and suggests a different date which it claims would be more appropriate.

The full text of the comment can be accessed at <https://independentaustralia.net/australia/australia-display/why-im-not-celebrating-australia-day,4915>

Arguments supporting changing the date of Australia Day

1. The date is offensive to Indigenous Australians

The Indigenous Australians Internet site, Creative Spirits, states of the current Australia Day celebrations 'To many Aboriginal Australians there is little to celebrate and it is a commemoration of a deep loss - loss of their sovereign rights to their land, loss of family, loss of the right to practice their culture.'

Aboriginal activist Michael Mansell has claimed, 'Australia Day on 26 January is a date whose only significance is to mark the coming to Australia of the white people in 1788. It's not a date that is particularly pleasing for Aborigines. The British were armed to the teeth and from the moment they stepped foot on our country, the slaughter and dispossession of Aborigines began.'

Indigenous Australians call it 'Invasion Day', 'Day of Mourning', 'Survival Day' or, since 2006, 'Aboriginal Sovereignty Day'. The latter name reflects that all Aboriginal nations are sovereign and should be united in the continuous fight for their rights.

Indigenous opposition to the January 26 celebrations has been longstanding. On Australia Day's 150th anniversary, in 1938, William Cooper, a member of the Aboriginal Progressive Association, declared the day a 'Day of Mourning', alluding to the annual re-enactment of Phillip's landing. Aboriginal people refused to participate in the re-enactment because it included chasing away a party of Aboriginal people.

Cooper and two other Aboriginal men, Jack Patten and William Ferguson, organised a conference to grieve the collective loss of freedom and self-determination of Aboriginal communities as well as those killed during and after European settlement in 1788.

Fifty years later, the re-enactments had been discontinued. Opponents of the January 26th celebrations note that the discontinuance of the re-enactments indicates that a further change in the nature of the day could occur, including a change of date.

In an opinion piece published in The Guardian on November 28, 2016, Dom Knight stated, 'We should move Australia Day away from 26 January because it's a date that anyone with the tiniest shred of empathy can see is difficult for many people with Indigenous heritage.'

Knight went on to claim, 'The start of a protracted, tragic conflict isn't a fitting occasion for fireworks, awards and pavlova. As a gesture of reconciliation, moving the date is literally the least we can do.'

Knight concluded that the disputed nature of the current date makes it inappropriate for most, if not all, Australians. He stated, 'As long as we keep it, a significant proportion of non-Indigenous Australians will be unable to celebrate without feeling like they're letting off party poppers at a memorial service. And as long as we keep it, we'll keep having debates like this every single year.'

A similar point has been made by former federal Resources and Science Minister, Ian Macfarlane, who has also stated that the offence the date gives many Australians means it will remain a source of division. Mr Macfarlane has stated, 'I believe [changing the date] is an important way to prevent a potential schism in Australia's society and to remove a potential roadblock to reconciliation and a greater Australia.'

Macfarlane further stated, 'We can't reasonably expect indigenous Australians to "draw that line in history" [between past wrongs and present reality] while we continue to celebrate on a day which marks the beginning of their dispossession and the loss of their cultural control of this land.'

2. The date is not inclusive of all Australian states

Critics of January 26 as a date on which to celebrate Australia Day argue that it gives an inappropriate prominence to New South Wales. They note that if the intention is to celebrate British settlement of Australia, then one day is hardly

appropriate. Australia did not exist as a single political entity until Federation, which occurred on January 1, 1901. Prior to that, from a Eurocentric viewpoint, Australia was a set of independent states and territories occupying the same continent. Each state or territory had had a different colonial past and claimed different dates for its first contact with British colonisers. Therefore, critics claim, if the aim of the day is to celebrate Australia's British heritage, then January 26 gives undue prominence to New South Wales.

This position has been put by Dom Knight in an opinion published in *The Guardian* on November 28, 2016. Knight humorously stated, 'Let's not forget that what we're commemorating on 26 January is the foundation of New South Wales, and specifically, Sydney. Colin Barnett's defence of this date is the only time I can remember someone from WA wanting to celebrate anything to do with the east coast.'

The same point has been made by Fremantle mayor, Dr Brad Pettitt. The Fremantle City Council decided that in 2017 it would not hold its Australia Day celebrations on January 26. Dr Pettitt explained that part of the rationale for this decision was that while January 26 might have historical significance for New South Wales, the date held no such importance for states such as Western Australia.

Dr Pettitt stated, 'As a West Australian, I've always found Australia Day to be odd. It is New South Wales day. In terms of the relevance to Western Australia, it's a pretty long bow to draw.'

Critics note that the use of January 26 as a date for an Australia-wide celebration is a relative recent occurrence and that initially it was celebrated solely in New South Wales. In an opinion piece published in *The Adelaide Advertiser* on January 20, 2017, Susan Johnson stated, 'Originally referred to in New South Wales as Foundation Day or First Landing Day, it wasn't until 30 years after the First Fleet arrived - in 1818 - that governor Lachlan Macquarie declared the day a public holiday (but only for Sydney)... [I]t wasn't until 1994 - under the Paul Keating Labor government - that the official celebration of Australia Day on the actual date of January 26 began.'

The significance of this late adoption of January 26 by all the Australian states and territories has been noted by Warren Mundine in an opinion piece published in *The Daily Telegraph* on January 24, 2017. Mr Mundine stated, 'For most of their history the other colonies/states didn't commemorate January 26 because it was a day of significance for NSW. They resisted embracing it as the national day, reluctant to signal NSW as the senior state.'

3. The date does not fully reflect Australia's identity

Opponents of January 26 as Australia's national day claim that a date which commemorates the first colonisation, of what is now Australia, is too narrow a focus for a national celebration. They argue that this date, and the manner in which it is sometimes celebrated, excludes important elements of Australia's national identity, including our independence and the full diversity of the mix of peoples that make the country what it is.

Critics of the choice to celebrate Australia Day on a date that celebrates the country's colonisation note that Australia is the only Commonwealth nation to choose such an anniversary as its national day. In an opinion piece published in *The New Matilda* on January 28, 2016, Max Chalmers stated, 'Of the 53 countries who remain signatories to the Commonwealth Charter only one commemorates the successful invasion of its own lands with a holiday. Australia is the only nation which places the beginning of its own colonisation as the central day of national celebration.'

Opponents of the current date and of the manner in which the day is often celebrated call for a date and a mode of celebration that includes all Australians - Indigenous Australians, Anglo-Saxon Australians, Celtic Australians and the Australians drawn from all parts of the globe who have made this country their home in successive waves of immigration, especially post World War II.

This point was made by RMIT University Adjunct Professor Stephen Alomes, an historian of Australian nationalism and populism. Professor Alomes stated, 'A new and inclusive Australia Day - held on a less conflictual day, such as Constitution Day in May or Wattle Day in early September - can involve the recognitions we need. First, a recognition of Indigenous Australian history, and of Australia's settlers, that is settler-invaders we must admit, and of the several generations who followed them. Then, the important recognition of the waves of people of the last 70 years.'

4. The date does not commemorate a significant moment in Australia's British settlement

Some critics note that if the intention of the date of Australia Day is to mark Australia's indebtedness to British cultural and political traditions, then it is an unsuitable one.

Firstly, it has been noted, the date is not actually that on which the First Fleet, bringing permanent British settlers and their institutions, arrived in Australia.

As David Jenkins noted in a letter to the Editor published in *The Canberra Times* on January 25, 2017, 'January 26 is Sydney Day, commemorating when a group of English military gaoles and their ship-confined captives fetched up on their second choice for a site of settlement, the first of several across Australia as we now know it.

We don't celebrate the date of their original arrival some time around January 18, 1788, in Botany Bay...' These critics therefore conclude that if part of the intention of the day is to mark symbolically the arrival of the first British settlers, then the date is not accurate.

Critics also note that the date is not one that appropriately marks Australia's inheritance of a Westminster system of law and governance that underpins the freedoms we currently enjoy.

Australia began its British connection as a penal colony which did not enjoy many of the political rights and civil liberties that existed within Britain at the time. That Australia was initially a colony of convicts meant that some privileges did not apply.

The colony's first law courts were very different from the English ones. The judge was a military officer, known as the judge advocate. In criminal cases there was a jury, but again this was made up of six military officers who decided the

case along with the judge. There was no jury of one's peers as applied in England. Also, in the early years of the settlement the Governor had absolute power, ruling without any sort of advisory council.

In an opinion piece published in Independent Australian on January 26, 2013, David Donovan wrote, 'Australia Day does not celebrate the beginnings of an independent nation - it celebrates the establishment of a British convict colony...'

5. The day has acquired an increasingly jingoistic focus

Critics of the current Australia Day have noted what some claim is a disturbingly jingoist, or narrowly patriotic and nationalistic quality to the manner in which it is celebrated by some.

In an overview of the history of the day, published on January 20, 2017, Susan Johnson stated, 'Australia's been growing more and more flag-waving and more feverishly patriotic every passing year. Where once Australia Day was just an excuse for a public holiday to watch the cricket or have a party with friends while listening to Triple J's Hottest 100, it's become a far more "Americanised" version of national pride.'

A number of social commentators have traced the rise in patriotic fervour to the prime ministership of John Howard who overtly encouraged the expression of national pride.

University of Queensland Associate Professor in Australian History Martin Crotty has stated, 'I'm a migrant myself (from New Zealand). I actually arrived here on Australia Day 1994 and I can tell you no one gave a bugger about it then. I've seen the feeling of nationalism grow exponentially over the last 22 years.'

Professor Crotty believes that this nationalistic enthusiasm was fostered under John Howard. The professor has stated, 'There (was) a general resistance to refugees and a very self-confident celebration of Australian nationalism under John Howard's prime ministership; he gave it a real boost.'

Dr Elizabeth Kwan, author of *Flag and Nation: Australians and Their National Flags*, has claimed that since 1901 market research surveys have shown a growth in Australians' awareness of Australia Day from 75.2 per cent in 1980 to 99.6 per cent by 2007, which marked the end of Howard's time in office.

Opponents of the current mode of celebrating Australia Day and of the connotations of the date on which it is celebrated fear that the day exacerbates a growing tendency toward prejudice and exclusion.

On January 9, 2014, University of Canberra assistant professor Robin Tennant-Wood claimed, 'There's been a certain aspect of nationalism that has crept into Australia Day celebrations. We see this particularly in young people, draped in the Australian flag and using it as an excuse to target people who don't look like them.'

Dr Tennant-Wood has claimed that the debate around the celebration highlighted the need for Australians to recognise their multicultural society and the sensitivities that surrounded Australia Day as a result.

Arguments opposing changing the date of Australia Day

1. The current date marks a significant event in Australia's history

Defenders of the January 26 as an appropriate national day for Australia stress the political, cultural and social significance of the British legacy in Australia. They claim that the current date is a suitable marker of the origin of this legacy.

This point was made by Kevin Donnelly, Senior Research Fellow at the Australian Catholic University, in a comment published by The Daily Telegraph on January 25, 2017. Donnelly stated, 'The arrival of the First Fleet is one of the most important events in Australian history as it represents the first step in our development as a liberal, Western democracy based on English common law and a Westminster Parliamentary system.'

Donnelly further stated, 'The rights and freedoms we now take for granted, including freedom of assembly and speech, the right to a fair and timely trial, and the right to vote and elect a representative government, trace their origins to events that occurred on January 26, 1788.'

Perth legal academic, Augusto Zimmerman, has similarly stated, 'When the penal colony of New South Wales was established in 1788, the laws of England were transplanted into Australia. As a result, the legal sociopolitical institutions of Australia found their primary roots in the legal and sociopolitical traditions of England.'

Some supporters further claim that all Australians, including those who claim to have been dispossessed and traumatised by the events of 1788, are the beneficiaries of the political and cultural traditions that were established at that time.

In an article published on The Unshackled on January 16, 2017, Lance Thomas stated of those critics, who claim to feel disposed, 'They are living in a country that has prospered as a result of British settlement and they have the opportunity to be a full and equal part of our great nation. The only reason people are still angry is because the media...continue to push an agenda of division instead of unity.'

On January 27, 2017, The Herald Sun published an opinion piece by commentator Andrew Bolt in which he similarly stated, 'The brutal fact is that while many Aborigines did suffer from colonisation - not least because of imported diseases - most today now lead lives immeasurably richer, freer and less painful as a result. Many now have some reason to feel grateful for European civilisation, despite the pain that came with it. There is in fact a reason why no Aborigine today chooses to live as their pre-colonisation ancestors did. It is time to recognise the truth of our history - that Aborigines were not merely victims of British colonisation.'

Additionally, Kevin Donnelly has noted that Australia's Christian legacy dates from the country's British settlement.

Donnelly has stated, 'While we are a secular society, where the constitution forbids favouring one religion over another, it is also true that, without Christian hospitals, schools and charitable organisations, Australia's education, health and welfare sectors would collapse.'

Christian concepts like the dignity of the person, the right to individual liberty and a commitment to social justice and the

common good also underpin our legal and political systems and way of life.'

2. Though the day's meaning can be enriched, the date has been consolidated by tradition

Supporters of the current date argue that a national identity is a mixture of change and continuity; however, within this mix, they claim the continuity is important.

According to this argument, there are established elements of a national identity that can be viewed in a variety of ways and there are elements of a nationality identity that are added to over time.

Those who think in this manner argue that the established date should be retained, while at the same time we enrich our attitude toward what the celebration is acknowledging.

Foreign correspondent Peter Greste, an Australia Day New South Wales Ambassador argues, 'I'm happy with the day. I think the day is important; it is about tradition and continuity.

It is OK for the message to change, these things are constantly evolving over time, but I think the date needs to stay there.'

In an opinion piece published in The Herald Sun on December 8, 2016, Tom Elliott also argued for the continuity that a fixed date supplies. He stated, 'Apart from, perhaps, New Year's Day, every holiday has its detractors. But this doesn't mean we should abandon them. The various dates we celebrate, commemorate and remember exist because they form an important part of our social fabric.'

It has been noted that although January 26 has been established as Australia Day across all Australian states and territories only since 1994, that is now a full generation ago and for many Australians it is the only date they have known. It is also the case that for all Australians January 26 is the only date to have been celebrated by all states and territories as the country's national day; therefore, it is claimed, though the tradition is relatively recent, it is significant and changing it would be difficult.

In an analysis published on the ABC's Internet site on January 25, 2017, James Purtill noted, 'In the last 20 years, we have made the anniversary of the first day of British colonialism a day of national celebration. Awareness of Australia Day has grown from 75.2 per cent in 1980 to 99.6 per cent in 2007.'

On January 27, 2013, Benjamin Thomas Jones noted, 'Without a viable alternative, a move away from 26 January will receive a negative backlash, not only from conservatives, but from many members of the community who have only ever seen it as a day to celebrate all that is good about the country.'

3. The date can be marked in a way that is respectful of Indigenous Australians and recognises cultural diversity

It has been claimed that Australia Day can be celebrated on January 26 in a way that is sensitive to the attitudes of Australian citizens who are not of British origin and which recognises their contributions. Equally the day can be celebrated in a way that acknowledges Australia's evolving identity and the contributions of more recent immigrants.

This point has been made by Australia's Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, who has stated, 'It is a day where we celebrate the rich diversity of all of our cultures - from our First Australians as we saw with Tina's beautiful welcome to country on behalf of her people, the Ngunnawal people of this region here in the Canberra area, to the new citizens, migrants who come from such a diverse range of countries.'

On January 27, 2013, Benjamin Thomas Jones similarly noted, 'Let us keep 26 January as the national day and be ever vigilant to ensure that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people walking together is something both sides can celebrate.'

Anthony Dillon, lecturer in the faculty of Health Sciences at the Australian Catholic University, has noted, 'While I see Australia Day as a day of celebration, it is also perfectly legitimate for people to take time to reflect on past injustices associated with the invasion. Australia Day can be a day of remembrance and reflection, as well as celebrations.'

Dillon further noted, 'It does not have to be one or the other - we can reflect on the past, with particular attention given to the injustices endured by Aboriginal people since the invasion, and celebrate what a great country Australia is today.'

It has been noted that efforts must also be made to ensure that the ethnic and cultural diversity which large-scale immigration has brought to Australia be properly acknowledged.

In January 2017 an Australia Day billboard showing the image of two young Australian girls of Muslim descent wear hijabs was withdrawn because threats were received from those with prejudiced views toward Islam. In response, a crowd funding campaign has raised more than \$130,000 to get the photograph reinstated on billboards across the country.

Some commentators have suggested that this response is emblematic of the attitude Australia should be adopting - one of tolerance and inclusion regarding the diversity of peoples that make up the Australian community. The United Muslims of Australia organisation has stated, 'This is a great initiative that must be fully supported because it reflects the true Australian spirit.'

4. Changing the date would be of no practical benefit to Indigenous Australians

It has been claimed that changing the date would merely be an empty symbolic gesture which would do nothing to improve the circumstances of Indigenous Australians.

In an opinion piece published in The Conversation of January 25, 2017, Anthony Dillon, a

Lecturer in the Faculty of Health Sciences at the Australian Catholic University stated, 'In response to my words "Australia is a great country to live in", some will immediately retort: "Well, it's not so great for many Aboriginal people." I agree, and this should never be forgotten. But how will protesting about the date and Australia Day help those Aboriginal people most in need?'

Dillon continued, 'Protesting about the day, I believe, is a smokescreen to obscure the real problems that many

Aboriginal Australians face today. In addition to the problem of violence there is poor health, community dysfunction, unemployment, child neglect, and poor school attendance.'

In conclusion Dillon stated, 'These problems will not be solved by changing the date of Australia Day or giving it a new name. For those objecting to Australia Day celebrations, I encourage you to consider the aforementioned problems and ask yourself: "How will changing the name or the date help those who are suffering most?"'

Opponents of a date change note that many Indigenous Australians share Dillon's view regarding the 'pointlessness' of such a change. Northern Territory leader Jacinta Nampijinpa Price has stated, 'I keep hearing that Aboriginal people want to change the date of Australia Day... why aren't these people as concerned about the aboriginal people affected by domestic violence, alcohol and drug abuse? Why aren't the marches for murdered Aboriginal women as big as the marches occurring today?'

The Indigenous leader compared changing the date of Australia Day with the Rudd government's apology to the 'stolen generation' and suggests that such gestures change nothing. She stated, 'After all has saying 'sorry' stopped domestic violence and dysfunction? Has saying 'sorry' saved an Aboriginal life? I know it did absolutely nothing for me but most token symbolism does very little for me because in my opinion only hard work, responsibility and real action can make real change.'

In a comment published on January 27, 2017, by news.com.au Joe Hildebrand stated, 'We cannot reverse the mistakes of the past, nor fully remedy them. There is a limit to justice when both the victims and the perpetrators are long dead. All any mortal can do is accept the present and try to improve the future.'

So maybe we should change the date of Australia Day or maybe we shouldn't. Either way it will make no difference to the lives of Aboriginal people unless we couple it with more than hashtags and hand-wringing.'

5. Changing the date would provoke widespread hostility

It has been noted that there is no general consensus within Australia to change the date of Kate Darian-Smith, professor of Australian Studies and History at the University of Melbourne, has stated, 'Any decision to change Australia Day to an alternative date or disband it altogether would need to be made by the combined federal and state governments.'

That seems unlikely to happen. Suggestions from time to time that Australia Day be moved to another date have met with little enthusiasm.'

In the absence of a clear national consensus it has been argued that changing the date of Australia Day would not remove ill-feeling. It has been claimed that a change of date would simply shift the sense of grievance from some Indigenous Australians and those more recently settled in Australia to the larger group of Australians who have become used and attached to the current date.

Indigenous spokesperson, former West Australian of the Year and former head of the Australia Day Council WA, Robert Isaacs, has criticised the city of Freemantle's attempt to shift the date of Australia Day.

Isaacs has stated, 'The shire needs to retract what it's doing. It's not in line with community attitudes.'

I strongly condemn them for this whole thing. They've really upset a lot of people and are not representing the ratepayers. Australia Day is Australia Day.'

A range of public comments rejecting the Freemantle shire's decision indicate the hostility which changing the date of Australia Day would be likely to provoke. One respondent noted, 'Shame on Freemantle council for caving in to racist bullies and bigots. I hope that you remove the Australian flag from your flagpoles since I am sure that someone will find that offensive!' Another respondent feared that he would be termed a bigot for supporting the January 26 date. He stated, 'The regressive left continue to inflict their sanctimonious political correctness on normal Australians. What's worse, if you dare to disagree with them, you are branded racist or bigot. Rather than uniting us this will only create division in this country.' Another commentator stated, 'I am offended by this race-based date change. It attacks all non-aboriginal people, branding them as criminals.'

Further implications

Whether or not the date on which Australia Day is celebrated is ultimately changed across the country is unlikely to remove the divisiveness of the day.

Much of the dispute seems to be grounded in what we, as a country, choose to celebrate about ourselves. The current January 26th date accentuates that division, because many indigenous Australians see it as a celebration of the British annexation of the country of their ancestors. For those of non-British backgrounds, a focus on Australia's British legacy can also be seen as diminishing the value of what they have brought to this country.

However, attempts to recast the day, acknowledging Aboriginal dispossession and the contributions of non-British Australians are also fraught with difficulty. They are seen as offensive by many of those who believe Australia's British legacy and Anglo-Saxon-Celtic traditions are what are most distinctive and valuable about this nation.

The whole debate reflects an uncertainty about Australia's national identity. This is an issue of long-standing. Part of it seems to derive from our junior status on the world stage as a young nation, at least in terms of our Anglo-European origins. The growth in migration since World War II, such that Australia now terms itself a multicultural nation, has created some strain, now intensified by anxiety and increased xenophobia in response to Islamic terrorist groups operating around the globe.

The on-going apprehension regarding finite resources and a supposed lack of opportunity for those who have 'grown here' rather than 'flown here' is also an element in the mix of contending views. As evidenced by the Brexit vote in Great Britain and the recent Trump presidential campaign in the United States, a narrow, self-protecting nationalism is one response to increased unemployment and social dislocation. In addition to this, a growing political confidence and

assertiveness among Indigenous spokespeople, coupled with Indigenous Australians' ongoing problematic position re many socio-economic and health indicators has resulted in Indigenous dissatisfaction being voiced more loudly. There is no simple solution to the tensions outlined above. Changing the date of Australia Day is likely to cause as much offence as it alleviates and unless the underlying issues which have made the date problematic are addressed, date-changing will not, of itself, resolve the strains.

Ultimately, the debate surrounding the change of the date of Australia Day may in itself be beneficial. The airing of prejudices and concerns is the first step to addressing them and having them dissipate. For harmony to be found, the debate may have to be a long one resulting in practical as well as symbolic measures. Causes rather than symptoms need to be addressed.

Newspaper items used in the compilation of this issue outline

The Guardian, January 26, 2017, comment by Paul Daley, *Invasion Day will come to rival Anzac Day in years to come*



Herald-Sun, January 30, 2017, comment by Andrew Bolt, *ABC claims push building for changing the date of Australia Day*



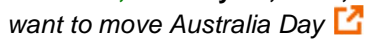
The Conversation, January 26, 2017, background by Kate Darian-Smith, *Australia Day, Invasion Day, Survival Day: a long history of celebration and contestation*



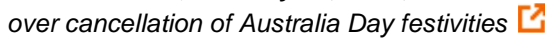
Huffington Post, January 25, 2017, comment by Mehreen Faruqi, *Australia Day Is Stained With Blood And It's Time We Moved It*



The SMH, January 26, 2017, news item by Fergus Hunter, *Barnaby Joyce launches extraordinary attack on people who want to move Australia Day*



ABC TV News, January 28, 2017, news item by Claire Moodie, *'An act of betrayal against Australia': Fremantle divided over cancellation of Australia Day festivities*



ABC TV News, January 28, 2017, comment by Anthony Dillon, *Australia Day: Changing date 'pointless', and there is much to celebrate* - see also **ABC TV News, January 25, 2017**, background by James Purtill, *January 26: What would it take to change the date of Australia Day?*

