



January 26th Position Statement

Some local councils have changed how they mark Australia Day. This has led to increased debate in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, and reflection on the appropriateness of celebrating on 26th January. We encourage Victorians to reconsider how we celebrate Australia Day.

Reconciliation Victoria acknowledges that as with any community, there is a diversity of views within Aboriginal communities. Some view the day as an opportunity to celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' survival as the longest continuing culture on earth within the story of the modern Australian nation.

However, **there is a strong view within Aboriginal communities and the reconciliation movement that January 26 represents the beginning of an unlawful invasion with devastating impacts still felt by Aboriginal communities.** Commemorating 'Australia Day' has been questioned from at least 1938 when Aboriginal leaders declared it a 'Day of Mourning'. To many since then it has been known as 'Invasion Day'.

The arrival of Europeans dramatically changed the lives and freedoms of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities throughout Australia, bringing widespread disadvantage and despair.

Right across the country, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders can testify to the impacts of colonisation. They continue to experience marked deficits in health, education, employment, justice and child-removal outcomes.

It's useful to remember that Australia Day as we know it today, has only existed as a national holiday since 1994. Moving the day is not such a radical step or break with tradition.

It is timely for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians to re-examine this country's true history and work together to create a new identity – one informed by truth and understanding, that acknowledges the richness that Aboriginal culture and knowledge contributes to this country.

Changing the date is no more 'divisive' than how we currently commemorate the date.

Reconciliation Victoria encourages a continuing and respectful national conversation about the suitability of celebrating our national day on the 26th January. This conversation would help us reflect on who we are as a nation, what we stand for, and what date in our history best reflects those values and attributes.

Belinda Duarte, Co-Chair of Reconciliation Victoria, explains that **"by increasing awareness of our history, all Australians will be richer in their identity and further understand why Australia Day evokes strong emotions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal people"**.