

# Let's talk...

January 26



**What does January 26 mean to you? A day off? A barbecue and fireworks? A celebration of who we are as a nation? A day of mourning and invasion? A celebration of survival?**

Australians hold many different views on what January 26 means to them.

For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, it isn't a day for celebration. Instead, January 26 represents a day on which their way of life was invaded and changed forever. For others, it is Survival Day – a celebration of the survival of people and culture, and the continuous contributions Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples make to Australia.

Let's talk January 26, and reflect on how we can create a day that all Australians can celebrate and be proud of.

## **A brief history of January 26...**

- > **From approx. 60,000 BC** the continuing culture and traditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples flourishes across Australia
- > **1788** The First Fleet lands on Australian shores, and Captain Phillip raises the Union Jack as a symbol of British occupation
- > **1818** January 26 is first recognised as a public holiday in NSW, to mark the 30th anniversary of British settlement
- > **1935** All states and territories agree to a common name for January 26 (Australia Day) and time (the Monday nearest to January 26) of celebrations
- > **1938** Re-enactments of the First Fleet landing are held in Sydney, including the removal of a group of Aboriginal people. This practice of re-enactment continues until 1988, when the NSW government demands that it stop
- > **1938** Aboriginal activists hold a 'Day of Mourning' aimed at securing national citizenship and equal status for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- > **1968** Lionel Rose becomes the first Aboriginal Australian to be named Australian of the Year
- > **1972** The Aboriginal Tent Embassy is established on the lawns of Parliament House, Canberra, in reaction to Prime Minister William McMahon's Aboriginal policy
- > **1988** The Freedom, Justice and Hope march, held in Sydney, is attended by over 40,000 Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, drawing national and international attention to Indigenous rights in Australia
- > **1992** The first Survival Day concert is held in Sydney
- > **1994** January 26 becomes a national public holiday in Australia

- > **2000** Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue, a member of the Yunkunytjatjara peoples of Central Australia, delivers the annual Australia Day address, calling for a conversation on changing the date of Australia Day
- > **2013** Flinders Island Council (TAS) recognises the diverse nature of January 26 celebrations, and now holds the 3 day Furneaux Islands Festival near the date, as a day of inclusive celebration
- > **2014** Townsville Council officially celebrates both Survival Day (on January 24) and Australia Day (on January 26)
- > **2016** City of Freemantle (WA) announces its decision to end its annual fireworks show on January 26 from 2017, and votes to engage in more culturally appropriate activities
- > **2017** City of Darebin Council and Yarra Council (VIC) both vote within the space of a week to end the formal celebration of Australia Day on January 26. A third Victorian council – Moreland – votes in favour of dropping all references to Australia Day, and joins the push to change the date of the national celebration

Radio station Triple J announces it will no longer hold its annual music countdown (the Hottest 100) on January 26, after more than half of 65,000 survey respondents say they support a change of date

### Some quick statistics...

**40,000** Australians attended the Freedom, Justice and Hope march in 1988 to celebrate the survival of Aboriginal people and culture<sup>1</sup>

Yabun Festival – the single largest Indigenous festival in Australia, and one of the most important music events in the country, was attended by approximately **35,000** people in 2017<sup>2</sup>

**7 in 10** voters say Australia Day is important to them but a majority of the population can't accurately name the event it commemorates<sup>3</sup>

When a representative sample of voters was asked to identify the historical event marked on Australia Day from a list of **6** possible alternatives, only **43 per cent** correctly named the landing of the First Fleet at Sydney Cove in 1788<sup>4</sup>

### Watch...

**Mick Dodson** accepting his 2009 Australian of the Year award

**Adam Goodes** accepting his Award in 2014, speaking of his hope for all Australians to work for reconciliation

<sup>1</sup> Source: Museums Victoria

<sup>2</sup> Source: Destination NSW

<sup>3</sup> According to a 2017 poll by Review Partners

<sup>4</sup> According to a 2017 poll by Review Partners

## Some perspectives...

*"It's not about trying to lay guilt on individuals but it's about trying to make sure that our future, our children and Australians generally, have an understanding of the history of Australia."*

**Professor Tom Calma AO, Co-Chair, Reconciliation Australia**

*"For me, the most important first step to reconciliation is dialogue... I would, however, make a strong plea for a change of date. Let us find a day on which we can all feel included, in which we can all participate equally, and can celebrate with pride our common Australian identity."*

**Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue, Australian of the Year 1984**

*"January 26 is a difficult date for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and is not a date that can serve as a unifying national day of celebration."*

**Karen Mundine, CEO, Reconciliation Australia**

*"The great majority of Indigenous people want to live in one Australia; want to share in its destiny; want to participate in and contribute to its progress; but at the same time, want the recognition and respect that their status and millennia- old civilisation so clearly warrant."*

**Sir Gustav Nossal, Australian of the Year 2000**

*"It is one thing to acknowledge the fact of invasion; it is quite another to celebrate it."*

**Michael Mansell, Lawyer and Indigenous rights activist, upon refusing his Senior Australian of the Year 2014 nomination**

## Take action...

Visit our [website](#) for more resources and factsheets

Attend events such as **Yabun Festival** or a Survival Day concert, and gain a different perspective on how Australian peoples, cultures and histories can be celebrated

Read about the incredible work and valuable contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **Australian of the Year Awards** Nominees and Recipients. You can also nominate someone for an award, and join in on the national conversation by using the hashtag #AusoftheYear