



11 November 2019

Statement of support for Inner West Council to shift Australia Day Celebrations

Reconciliation NSW supports the proposal before Inner West Council to move all Australia Day ceremonial and celebratory events, other than the citizenship ceremony, away from 26 January in recognition of the meaning of the day to Aboriginal people.

As the peak body for advancing reconciliation in NSW, Reconciliation NSW promotes respectful, just and equitable communities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and all people in NSW.

We encourage local government, organisations and community groups to approach 26 January respectfully. This includes recognising the honoured place and contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our nation's history, being sensitive to the feelings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may see the day as one of mourning, and seeking opportunities to celebrate the survival, strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures.

For many years Reconciliation NSW has had a presence at Yabun, an annual Aboriginal-run festival that celebrates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures held on 26 January each year on the edge of the Inner West Council area. Yabun provides a positive social space for audiences to celebrate, share, and immerse themselves in the world's oldest surviving culture. We support Inner West Council's proposal to encourage as many Inner West Council residents to attend this event, and their desire not to host a festival competing with Yabun.

We note that several local councils have changed how they mark Australia Day. Reconciliation NSW supports a respectful and continuing national conversation about shifting our national day from 26 January. Such a 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.

Reconciliation NSW acknowledges that as with any community, there is a diversity of views within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 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. Others feel 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'.

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 Islander people can testify to the impacts of colonisation. They continue to experience marked deficits in health, education, employment, justice and child-removal outcomes.

We note that Australia Day as we know it today, has only existed as a national holiday since 1994. It has been argued that moving Australia Day celebrations to a different 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.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Lindon Coombes
Indigenous Co-Chair
Reconciliation NSW



Cecilia Anthony
Non-Indigenous Co-Chair
Reconciliation NSW