



Let National Wattle Day end the Australia Day arguments

Friday marks the first day of spring and National Wattle Day – a century old celebration of Australia and its people. President of the Wattle Day Association, Terry Fewtrell, believes linking Australia Day with Wattle Day could unite the country.

First it was Fremantle, then Hobart and now Melbourne. Something is stirring. Local councils around the country are increasingly calling for something to change about our celebration of Australia Day on 26 January. It marks the arrival of the First Fleet at Port Jackson in 1788. It has changed previously, being known at earlier times as First Landing Day or Foundation Day. There is no reason why it can't change in some ways again.

For some such calls for change are unpatriotic. Others see them as signs of increasing awareness and sensitivity to Aboriginal people. Perhaps also they are markers of progress on our shared journey of Reconciliation. The reality of the date of 26 January for Aboriginal people is not going to go away. The question is how, as individuals, communities and a nation, do we best respond? The answer is more obvious than we realise.

Australia has several national symbols but perhaps there is one that unites us all. That symbol is our national floral emblem the Golden Wattle. It has been the great witness to the whole of the Australian story. It has been in our land for more than 30 million years and has welcomed us all – Aboriginal, colonials, post-war and 21st century migrants. It has no historical baggage. It is our colours – the green and gold.

So Wattle can help us solve the conflict and sadness around an Australia Day celebrated on 26 January. We could link National Wattle Day, officially proclaimed 25 years ago this year, with Australia Day as joint days on which we celebrate Australia, this land, its people and our nation. National Wattle Day would not **compete** with Australia Day, rather it would **complete** Australia Day. It would do what Wattle has always done – unite us.

Rather than let national celebrations descend into increasingly bitter argument and disunity, we could embark on a process of celebrating both days and for a period of five years, let all Australians celebrate on either or both days, in ways that they consider most appropriate. Wattle has great meaning and significance and for those looking for more than just a 'beers on

Celebrating Australia and the Australian Spirit

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Association Inc.

the beach' celebration, it teaches us and challenges us how to survive and live in harmony with this ancient land.

Implementation of this arrangement would be relatively simple. National Wattle Day is already a gazetted national day, celebrated each year on 1 September. Linking that date with 26 January would put the focus on unity rather than disunity and enable us to channel the various ideas and beliefs about national identity and its celebration into constructive and thoughtful proposals. In time we can create national celebrations that are accepted by all in a united and reconciled Australia. ***See more on how the arrangement would work - [HERE](#)***

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