



26 January 2021

Australia Day - great celebration but needs a new date

1 September is an alternative date worth considering for Australia Day celebrations. This is also National Wattle Day, a springtime celebration that offers a rich history and meaning for all Australians. National days say something about the identity and values of the people who celebrate them. This year the government-owned National Australia Day Council (NADC) gives the following description:

‘On Australia Day, we reflect on our history, its highs and its lows.

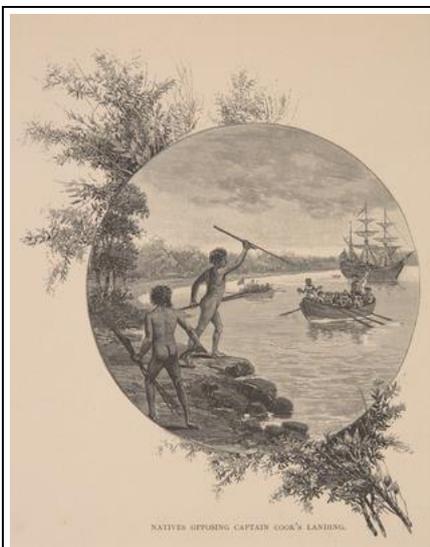
We respect the stories of others.

And we celebrate our nation, its achievements and most of all, its people.’

Australia Day is the latest of four names used for the anniversary of 26 January 1788. During the 1800s it was called First Landing Day, Foundation Day and Anniversary Day, arguably all accurate descriptions. Celebration of a nation – that is something different. Australia became a nation in 1901 on 1 January – another date for consideration if we are in good shape after New Year’s Eve celebrations.

On 26 January 1788, when the British raised their Union Jack to mark the occupation of New South Wales, everything in Australia, even the soil, was to change. But upon reflection, is this date, although obviously significant, the best date for a national day of celebration clearly aimed to include all Australians? Does this date for an Australia Day show respect for the stories of indigenous Australians for example? Have we been listening?

A date for celebration is more than a matter of firsts. Otherwise we might be celebrating the arrival in March 1606 of Willem Janszoon in New Holland, as Australia was then known. That was the first of many visits by Dutch explorers such as Dirk Hartog and Abel Tasman before Captain Cook sailed into Botany Bay 164 years later on 29 April 1770. Or we might be celebrating 22 August 1770 when Cook claimed the eastern portion of the Australian continent for the British Crown on 22 August 1770, naming it New South Wales.



Macleod, W. 1888, *Natives opposing Captain Cook's landing* Picturesque Atlas Publishing Company, Sydney ; Melbourne viewed 24 January 2021 <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-145314525>

Titled 'Natives opposing Captain Cook's landing' The image, based on Cook's journal entry for the 29 April 1770, depicts two Gweagal men standing on a rocky outcrop on Dharawal Country holding spears. There are two small row boats approaching with HMB ENDEAVOUR in the distance.

Why resist a change of date for Australia Day? Dates, names and relevance of national days have changed again and again. For example, we no longer celebrate Empire Day on Queen Victoria's birthday on 24 May. Empire Day, honouring the British Empire, was first celebrated in Australia in 1905, four years after Queen Victoria died (22 January 1901). The name was changed to (British) Commonwealth Day in 1958 following the decolonisation of the British Empire after the London Declaration in 1949. The date on 24 May was later changed to the 'official' date for Queen Elizabeth II birthday (the second Monday of June) in 1966 – although she was born on 21 April.

Wattle Day, celebrated in various states and territories since 1910 at different times between August and September when the wattles were at their blooming best has grown in popularity over the last decade. This grass roots resurgence of interest was facilitated in 1992 by the Governor-General's proclamation that made National Wattle Day a national day, across all states and territories on the same day - 1 September – every year. Twenty-seven years later, the current Governor-General of Australia, His Excellency General the Honourable David Hurley said, 'Wattle Day is all about appreciating wattle and celebrating what it is, and means, to be Australian. It is a day to appreciate how fortunate we are. A day to remember that we are strongest and at our best when we look out for our neighbours and when we respect and care for each other'.

From a practical point of view, 1 September happens to be a very good time of year for a national public holiday because there are no others between July and November and it wouldn't clash with any state or territory wide celebration (Tammy Solonec 2014).

National Wattle Day continues to offer a unifying way forward for all Australians as a national celebration of what it means to be Australian and to live in this extraordinary land, irrespective of whether Australia Day continues on 26 January.

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President

Wattle Day Association Inc.

(founded in 1998)