



## Let's make Australia Day Gold

Just as we have celebrated the New Year and enjoy the summer holidays, people start writing newspaper articles and letters to the Editor about Australia Day. Yes, let's celebrate Australia Day – but on which day? The historical significance of 26 January 1788 has been recognised and reflected in the various names it has been given, such as First landing Day, Foundation Day and Anniversary Day.

Aboriginal Australians have named this day from their own experiences since the arrival of the British. They called it a Day of Mourning during protests in Sydney in 1938 and Invasion Day during the large demonstrations in the 1988 bicentenary year. The growing community awareness of what it means for Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders to lose sovereignty on 26 January 1788 and the ensuing pain and disadvantage, parallels the increasing support for the Reconciliation and Recognise movements. So, the problem is not going to go away – it needs a solution.

For several years the Wattle Day Association has advocated for fresh thinking about this decades-long Australia Day controversy and suggested a way forward to unite all Australians – indigenous, Australian-born and immigrant alike. National Wattle Day, celebrated annually on 1 September since at least 1910, has been an officially gazetted national day since 1992. Although it currently lacks the federal government financial support enjoyed by Australia Day celebrations, National Wattle Day does complement it. While 26 January is a day that marks the establishment of British Australia and the settlement under Governor Arthur Phillip in New South Wales, National Wattle Day is about the land – Australia, its beauty and its resilience as expressed in our national floral emblem. It is a day for all to celebrate our achievements and our aspirations. It excludes no one.

If National Wattle Day were to become a national public holiday, it is a pragmatic solution too, as pointed out by Tammy Solonec, granddaughter of a mission born and raised Nigena woman and grandchild of post WWII European refugees. In 2014 Tammy examined alternatives to 26 January and pointed out that there are currently no national public holidays after July and very few state or territory public holidays in the latter part of the year. Well placed, therefore, on 1 September each year, National Wattle Day also welcomes the spring as Australian landscapes are transformed in a blaze of golden colour. There is great symbolism in this timing and an obvious link to National Wattle Day's growing status as a day to celebrate and honour our land and life it gives to all of us.

The solution to finding a broadly acceptable date for the celebration of Australia Day is within our grasp: recognise both national days equally, link them to be joint but separate national celebrations, let the people work out how each day should develop and evolve over time. Let's hope however, that we will not have to wait another 80 years.

Terry Fewtrell  
President Wattle Day Association Inc.  
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Terry Fewtrell is available for interview on 0412 823 275