



## Let's celebrate together

The celebration of Australia Day on 26 January continues to be a day of debate and disagreement for many. Especially for younger Australians, this anniversary of the 1788 landing of British convict ships in New South Wales isn't working to inspire national unity.

There is no doubt that the 26 January has become a significant date in Australian history, but does it unify us in a celebration called Australia Day? For the record, it has been called First Landing Day, Foundation Day and Anniversary Day in centuries past. Perhaps it is time to remind ourselves that the names and the significance of national days can change over time. Ever heard of Empire Day (Queen Victoria's birthday on 24 May) that was celebrated after her death (in 1901) from 1903 – 1958 in Australia? On the other hand ANZAC Day (25 April 1915 – the Gallipoli Landing in World War I) has grown in significance for many Australians as the generations have passed.

Worthy anniversaries to consider for a national celebration include Federation Day on 1 January 1901, the opening of the first Federal Parliament on 9 May 1901 and the commencement of the Australia Act 1986 on 3 March. There is a day, however, that links us to the ancient land on which we all walk, through its unique flora. National Wattle Day on 1 September is rich in meaning through the optimistic symbolism of the golden wattle on the first day of a southern spring - a time of renewal and rebirth.

This happy springtime celebration was first celebrated more than a century ago on 1 September in 1910 in NSW, Victoria and South Australia. Wattle Day then became a popular addition to primary school activities for decades and the date changed to coincide with the local abundance of blooming wattles. The celebration was formalised by the Governor-General of Australia in 1992 as National Wattle Day – to be held on 1 September – for everyone across Australia.

In addition to being a day of unity with historic significance and an optimistic symbolism, National Wattle Day has practical advantages because on 1 September it doesn't clash with existing national or state public holidays.

For those of us who call Australia home, National Wattle Day has much to offer as a day of unity and joy at a time of year when national holidays are few and far between.

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