

Q&A - Change the Date

What is Amnesty's position?

- In 2018, Amnesty International Australia will show our support by allowing staff to work on 26 Jan in lieu of obtaining another public holiday as per our enterprise agreement.
- AIA will call on the Australian government to acknowledge the issue and consult with the community to choose a new date for Australia Day so it can be celebrated by all.

Background Information

26 January is the anniversary of British colonisation, the landing of the First Fleet and the first raising of the British flag. Colonial celebration of the date goes back to 1808 in New South Wales, but it was not until 1994 that the day was consistently nationally celebrated as Australia Day.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the 26th January is a day of mourning, invasion and survival. The date creates division, and alienates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Protests against the date have been documented since 1888, with notable protests since then including the 1938 Day of Mourning conference and march, the start of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in 1972, the '88 protest on Sydney Harbour, and the 2012 protests in Canberra.

Recent years have seen increasing momentum towards changing the date of Australia Day, with several local councils in Western Australia, Victoria and Tasmania amending their celebrations and extensive public and media debate.

Australia Day in 2017 was marked with public protests in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Townsville, Hobart and many other locations. In 2016 and 2017 AIA took a position in support of changing the date on social media and our website, generating significant and largely positive social media response. Since that time, both major political parties in Australia have come out against changing the date (although there have been moves within the Labor party at state conferences to change their position), and the issue continues to generate mainstream media interest.

To date there is not a formal campaign coalition to make the change, and there is some diversity of views in the Indigenous community. No single alternative date is proposed, although the Federation Day (1st January) and [Wattle Day](#) (1st September) have floated.

Possible and responses to #ChangetheDate

This is an issue that many people will have views on. Below are some questions and comments that you may come across in discussions on this issue. We have provided information and facts that may be helpful.

"We're apologising for something that happened 200+ years ago on a date that never even meant anything."

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been protesting on 26 January for over a century, including significant events:
 - 1938 Day of Mourning Conference
 - the beginning of the 1972 the Aboriginal Tent Embassy
 - the '88 protests which attracted 40,000 people.
- The day represents the start of colonisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples - the impacts of which include:
 - dispossession of land
 - loss of self determination
 - stolen wages
 - stolen children
 - loss of self determination
 - loss of culture
 - genocide
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples don't view this day as a day they can celebrate with fellow Australians.
- Moving the day is an acknowledgement of this ongoing issue and a way for us to move towards reconciliation and unity.

"It's a political correctness gone mad."

- This is a human rights issue. The fact that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been protesting for so long, regardless of who is in political power, shows that it is a human rights issue.
- It's about genocide, self-determination, the right to participate in decision making and many other human and Indigenous rights.
- This is not unique to Australia. Indigenous people in USA and Canada face similar issues with their national celebrations including Columbus Day, which has been changed to ['Indigenous Peoples Day'](#) in a number of US states and cities.

"Moving Australia day is a pointless gesture"

- Changing the date demonstrates that we are listening and recognise that this is a day of survival and mourning for this country's First Peoples.
- Choosing another day would mean that *all* Australians can celebrate our nation together.

"I don't think changing the date of the Hottest 100 or Australia Day changes a thing or helps Aboriginals in any way. Even if the date is celebrating the 'invasion' I think we should use the day to acknowledge the inclusive modern Australia that we have forged."

- Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people cannot and do not celebrate on 26 January.
- Every year there are protest marches, Survival Days, Days of Mourning and other cultural events around the country to mark 26 January. There are at least 20 events of these types of events occurring in 2018.
- We all want to celebrate our nation, but it needs to be on a day that is inclusive of *all* Australians, so we can all celebrate together.
- An inclusive modern Australia that we have forged is one in which we listen to and respect this nation's First Peoples. One in which we have a national day of celebration which is for everyone.

Why should we change the date now? We celebrate Australia day to accept our history- both the good and bad.

- The 26 January has only been an official national public holiday since 1994 - it is relatively recent.
- The term 'Australia day' was only used from 1935.
- Prior to this, each state and territory recognised different days at different times of the year.
- The day represents the start of colonisation and the genocide of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- It doesn't mean that the 26 January isn't a significant day in our history. It's just not a day to celebrate.

Australia is a multicultural country, why should we move a day to recognise one culture only?

- Yes, Australia is a multicultural country, it's one of our strengths.
- 26 January as a national celebration alienates many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people cannot and do not celebrate on 26 January (see above).
- This is evidenced by the ongoing protests and events held every year. These go back over a century.
- We all want to celebrate our nation, but it needs to be on a day that is inclusive of all Australians.

Who has Amnesty consulted on this position?

- In 2017 Amnesty consulted with a number of Indigenous and advocacy organisations.
- The response to our consultations were overwhelmingly positive.

What date does Amnesty suggest for Australia Day if not 26 January?

- We aren't proposing a new date.

- Amnesty International's position is to acknowledge this long running human rights issue and call on the government to consult for a new date for us all.

Aren't there more important issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People?

- Amnesty International works on a number of issues related to Indigenous peoples including our previous 'Homelands' campaign and our current 'Community Is Everything' campaign which seeks to end the overrepresentation of Indigenous kids in the criminal justice system. This work feeds into and supports all our Indigenous rights work including our Reconciliation Action Plan.
- The day represents the start of colonisation and the genocide of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Moving the day is an acknowledgement of this ongoing issue and a way for us to move forward in unity. Over the past number of years Amnesty has also campaigned and / or worked on and will continue to work on Indigenous rights. Our work has included:
 - Indigenous Youth Justice
 - Homelands
 - Child removal
 - Constitutional reform
 - International advocacy
 - Deaths in Custody
 - Reconciliation

For more info on the above see page 12 of our [Reconciliation Action Plan](#).

Most Australians want to [keep the date](#) as it is. Why are you forcing this issue?

- The rights of this nation's First Peoples are important.
- Amnesty's role is to promote human rights, and that means standing up for what's fair and just, even if we meet opposition to that.
- The colonisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is very much a human rights issue, as are the many inequalities still faced by Indigenous people today as a result.
- Our work is often to amplify the voices of rights holders.

Is your call to change the date of a public holiday here distracting you from other more important work, such as stopping executions or false imprisonment in other countries?

- We work to protect human rights in hundreds of ways, in every country in the world.
- That includes working to end one of the gravest human rights violations in Australia, the imprisonment and abuse of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children as young as 10 years old.
- Our decision to join the movement to move the date of Australia Day fits squarely with our human rights work.

- It's a straightforward human rights issues - it is simply right and fair to move the date to an inclusive date which we can all celebrate.
- Our other human rights work is ongoing.

I'm an Amnesty supporter and I don't want my money wasted on changing the date of a public holiday, when there are other more important issues, such as stopping executions or false imprisonment in other countries.

- Firstly, thank you for helping with all the hundreds of ways we work to protect human rights in every country in the world.
- We know that not every issue we work on is going to please everyone.
- However that doesn't mean we should shy away from an issue that will move Australia forward towards reconciliation and demonstrate that we are listening to this nation's First Peoples.
- Let's have a national celebration - which everyone can be part of.

Will all your staff be working on 26 January?

- AIA staff have the option to choose to work on 26 January and take another day as the holiday.
- This is in accordance with our Employment Agreement.
- This is voluntary - we recognise that some staff have family or other commitments on the day or may want to join celebrations and we support our staff members' choice either way.
- In 2017 about 15 percent of staff chose to work on 26 January, and took the public holiday off on another day.
- We are encouraging all staff to attend Indigenous led events on the day, in solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Why are you calling for this when some Aboriginal people, like Jacinta Price, want the day to stay the same?

- Let's make clear we are in favour of keeping Australia Day - it is an important day in our history.
- We call for the date of Australia Day to move to a date everyone can enjoy.
- In our discussions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities over many years, we've heard a range of views, and certainly many Indigenous people feel great pain on 26 January, and wish they could celebrate with everybody else, on a date that would include us all, not divide us.

Are you saying people who want to have Australia Day on 26 January are racist?

- Of course not. However it seems there is some misunderstanding around the call to move the date.
- Let's make clear we are in favour of keeping Australia Day!
- It's only the date that should move to a date everyone can enjoy.

- This is not a right or left issue, it's an issue of fairness and inclusiveness.
- We hope that celebrating Australia Day on another date which everyone can participate in will make our celebrations better and will unite us rather than divide us.

What hope do you have of changing the date, when PM Turnbull, and both sides of politics, are adamant the date will stay the same?

- Throughout history, every human rights movement has met with opposition, until the time comes when society chooses the path of fairness and justice. This is no different.
- Since at least the 1800s, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have protested 26 January as the anniversary of invasion.
- It has been a day of mourning much, much longer than it has been our gazetted national day, which only happened in 1994.
- In recent years, more and more non-Indigenous Australians have joined the call to hold Australia Day on any of the other 364 days in the year, so that we can all celebrate together.
- We hope our elected leaders begin to see this an issue of fairness and justice, not an issue of politics. We hope they do the right thing by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous people alike, and move the date to one that unites us, rather than divides us.