



26 January Position Statement

Whilst January 26 is considered a national holiday, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples it marks the start of ongoing colonisation of people and land – with significant negative impacts to health, education, employment and justice, including the tragic and ongoing removal of children.

The suitability of 26 January as a date of celebration has been called into question since at least 1938 when the Aboriginal Advancement League established the date as a Day of Mourning to “protest against the callous treatment” of First Peoples since colonisation. Since then, for many people 26 January has represented a day of protest against the ongoing racism and disadvantage faced by First Peoples as a direct result of colonisation. In comparison with this, **‘Australia Day’ has only existed as a national holiday since 1994.** Changing our approach to this date would therefore not be such a radical step or break with tradition.

The landscape in Victoria is changing and, as a state, we are leading the way with the development of a Treaty framework and the establishment of the Yoo-rrook Justice Commission. Year on year, the conversation around 26 January deepens and develops as Victorians learn more, embrace truth-telling and recognise our shared history. Calls continue to grow for a more respectful and inclusive approach to 26 January.

Reconciliation Victoria strongly encourages councils, organisations, and individuals to reconsider their acknowledgement of this significant date to reflect the diversity of views that surround it. We urge you to recognise and honour the place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in our nation's history, to be sensitive to the feelings of First Peoples who may see the day as one of mourning, and to use the day as an opportunity to promote understanding, respect, and reconciliation.

No matter the approach to the date, it is important to be mindful of the weight that it carries for First Peoples. **Cultural safety and awareness should be a priority for everyone on this date, and always.** Ensure discussions around the date are handled sensitively and be mindful of [cultural loading](#). Ensuring there are support systems available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples is vital to producing a culturally safe environment in which people feel safe, can freely affirm their identity, and where their needs are met.

Any approach to 26 January should be led by meaningful consultation with Traditional Owners, and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and individuals. Having these continuing and respectful conversations will help all councils reflect on their values and vision and how to best represent them in decision making.

reconciliation



victoria

It is crucial that when working for and with First Peoples, councils recognise they are not a homogeneous group and that there is a diversity of views within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

This is an opportunity for leadership. Councils have a responsibility to ensure that their commemorations reflect a true and representative view of 26 January. We encourage councils to take the opportunity that 26 January provides to educate their municipality and to establish a strong culture of respect and understanding of our shared history. Neglecting the views and perspectives of First Peoples on this date diminishes the entire community.

Reconciliation Victoria is committed to promoting good practice by councils through our [Maggolee website](#). We encourage councils who are changing their approach to 26 January to register their changes with our office so that we can better reflect the work of councils. We also encourage councils to utilise Maggolee as a resource for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Included on the site are resources about [26 January](#), [Cultural Safety](#), [Equitable Outcomes](#) and more.

Reconciliation Victoria has put together [protocols and suggestions](#) that will support councils in their approach to this date and lay the foundations for this vital, ongoing conversation. We strongly encourage councils to read and utilise these documents as a resource in their approaches.