



# MAYORAL MEMO - 16 AUGUST 2023

Australia Day is a day marked with both pride and reflection across the nation. Its historical roots reach back to the day in 1788 when the First Fleet of British Ships arrived at Port Jackson. Governor Arthur Phillip raised the Flag of Great Britain at Sydney Cove, commemorating the founding of a new colony.

Despite some early informal celebrations on 26 January, the first official anniversary was not until 1818, when Governor Lachlan Macquarie marked the 30th anniversary with a 30-gun salute. It took until 1946 for the states and territories to agree to recognise Australia Day on the same date, with the public holiday typically on the closest Monday. After the very first citizenship ceremony was held on 3 February 1949, the inclusion of citizenship ceremonies on Australia Day didn't take hold until the eighties. 26 January was finally unified as a public holiday across the nation in 1994.

The date holds different meanings for various communities. In 1938 the sesquicentenary was celebrated, but Aboriginal activists organised a Day of Mourning. In 1992 the "Survival Concert" saw many Aboriginals

starting to refer to 26 January as Survival Day.

Fast forward to recent times: At Council we have had to navigate complex decisions regarding the recognition of Australia Day in both Dubbo and Wellington as we continue to unite our community. In 2022 we considered a twilight event on 25 January 2023 for both of our ceremonies but faced a technical problem with the Australian Citizenship Ceremonies Code. Despite months of discussions with the Department of Home Affairs, on 8 December 2022 the final decision was made to proceed with a twilight event in Wellington while Dubbo's event would remain on 26 January with both ceremonies adding a formal speech from an Aboriginal perspective.

Just eight days after our decision, the Hon Andrew Giles MP announced a change to the Code allowing ceremonies up to three days either side of 26 January. It was too late for Dubbo to change for 2023 so the events proceeded as resolved.

After the changes to the Code, we are again considering our options for 2024 with a seven-day window available. At our most recent Standing Committee meetings, Councillors made a recommendation that Wellington host an event on the eve of Australia Day and Dubbo hold its ceremony on the morning of Australia Day but the final decision won't be made until our next Council meeting, to be held on Thursday 24 August.

This ongoing dialogue surrounding Australia Day in Dubbo and Wellington reflects a broader national conversation about identity, history and what it means to be Australian. It shows the care and attention that goes into ensuring the day remains a symbol of unity, remembrance and recognition.

Councillors want your opinion so together we can make Australia Day a meaningful occasion for all.

**Councillor Mathew Dickerson**

**Mayor of Dubbo Regional Council**

Last Edited: 16 Aug 2023