

Including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia Day events

"Australia Day is an important annual opportunity to recognise the honoured place of Indigenous Australians in our nation's history, and to promote understanding, respect and reconciliation."

p.8 http://www.australiaday.vic.gov.au/images/stories/australia_day_history.pdf

Australia Day means different things to different people and this is especially true for the First Australians. For many Indigenous Australians, 26 January is an occasion to reflect on past loss and suffering.

There are also those in the wider community who share these mixed emotions about our national day, and they appreciate the efforts of event organisers to acknowledge that.

Consultation

Wherever possible you should seek advice from local Indigenous people or organisations. This consultation is a valuable way of making your Australia Day events more inclusive of Indigenous citizens.

Understand that the process will not always be easy because observing Indigenous protocol has to allow for traditional discussion and decision-making. For example, not every Indigenous person can provide a 'Welcome to Country' - it must be performed by a recognised elder or other appropriate person within the area.

The most important thing is to take the time, and to show respect for different cultural groups and practices.

Simple ways to acknowledge members of the local Indigenous community:

- invite elders to play a special role in Australia Day events, including 'welcome to country', but understand and respect their feelings if they do not wish to take part
- suggest guest speakers acknowledge that, while Indigenous Australians have great pride in their heritage, Australia Day reminds them of past loss and these feelings are also a legitimate part of our national day
- acknowledge local Indigenous communities and the honoured place of the First Australians in event programs and/or fliers
- incorporate into your event a special ceremony which acknowledges past injustices in our nation's history
- fly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags alongside the Australian national flag at your events.

Observing Indigenous protocols

Ceremonies and protocols are an important part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. Incorporating ceremonies into Australia Day activities allows the wider community to share in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, and promotes a stronger sense of shared nationhood. Such ceremonies include 'Welcome to Country' to welcome visitors into a community and 'Smoking Ceremonies' to clear impurities from the land or sea.

A 'Welcome to Country' is where the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community (usually through its elders) welcomes people to the land of its ancestors. It happens at big events and formal functions involving people from other parts of the country or from overseas.

'Acknowledging Country' is another significant and symbolic gesture of reconciliation where an MC or speaker opens an event by acknowledging that it is taking place on the traditional country of the Indigenous community.

'Acknowledging Country' can take place even when traditional elders are not present.

Media

In publicising your Australia Day event, let the media know that your committee is acknowledging the cultural protocols and sensitivities of local Indigenous people, and how and why you are doing it.

<http://www.australiaday.org.au/event-organisers/knowning-your-community/inclusive-events/including-indigenous-peoples.aspx>