

Australia Day row: minister says no 'reasonable' case for changing the date

5 *Alex Hawke says campaign just Greens 'pushing that agenda' and moving celebration from 26 January would be a denial of history. Calla Wahlquist, Tue 16 Jan 2018, theguardian.com.*

The assistant immigration minister, Alex Hawke, says he has not heard a “reasonable argument” to support changing the date of Australia Day, saying the national day should not be moved “just because we have some elements of our history that we’re not proud of”.

10 He rejected a suggestion that 26 January was just the anniversary of the arrival of white people, because “I don’t think in that way and I don’t think of identifying people by their race.”

In the past year Hawke has written warning letters to several local councils who voted to move their celebrations and citizenship ceremony from the contentious date.

15 Speaking on Radio National on Tuesday, he said the “change the date” campaign was “a very top-down push” by the Greens, “not a bottom-up revolution of people saying they want to change the date”.

“I think if we did not have the Greens pushing that agenda, we would literally be hearing very little about this,” he said.

20 Hawke said moving Australia Day from 26 January, the day the first fleet of convict transports, escorted by the British navy, sailed into what was later called Sydney Cove, would be a denial of history.

He rejected RN Breakfast host Hamish Macdonald’s suggestion that commemorating the arrival of the first fleet was just commemorating the arrival of white people.

“It wasn’t an invasion, a planned invasion, it was colonisation by Britain,” Hawke said. “It had implications for Aboriginal Australians, there’s no doubt about it.”

25 The first recorded massacre of Aboriginal people occurred in 1794, according to a massacre mapping project by the University of Newcastle. There is no firm figure on the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who died in the frontier wars, but a conservative estimate by historian Henry Reynolds and others is 20,000.

30 Hawke said that Arthur Phillip, who commanded the first fleet and became the first governor of New South Wales, was “an enlightened person”.

“He was given orders to make peace with the natives,” he said. “Now, that may not have gone perfectly well, but it is our history. It is the start of modern Australia.”

35 Hawke’s comments follow comments by the Greens leader, Richard Di Natale, encouraging Greens members in local councils to push for changing the date, and a video by prime minister Malcolm Turnbull, who said he was “disappointed by those who want to change the date of Australia Day.”

“A free country debates its history, it does not deny it,” Turnbull said.

40 University of NSW law professor Megan Davis, a member of the Referendum Council whose Uluru statement for constitutional recognition of Indigenous Australians was rejected by Turnbull in October, said the prime minister was “too cowardly to cop an open and transparent debate on the country’s history”.

Opposition to celebrating on 26 January originated in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in the late 19th century. The first formal protest was the national day of mourning in Sydney in 1938, 54 years before the Australian Greens were founded.

45 Thousands of people marched across the country in Invasion Day rallies in 2017. In November, Triple J announced it would no longer hold its annual Hottest 100 countdown on 26 January after a nationwide survey of 65,000 people found that 60% supported changing the date.

A Guardian Essential Poll in September found that 26% of people supported changing the date of Australia Day, while 54% were opposed.

50 The former head of the prime minister’s Indigenous advisory council to Tony Abbott and Turnbull, Warren Mundine, said he supported changing the date but he did not believe it was a priority for all or most Aboriginal people.

Mark the statements below true (T) or false (F).

1. The assistant immigration minister, Alex Hawke, denies the fact that Australia is not proud of some elements of its history.
2. Alex Hawke doesn't believe that 26th January was simply the anniversary of the arrival of the white people.
3. Some of Australia's local councils have voted to change the date of their citizenship ceremonies.
4. Alex Hawke blames the Green party for the campaign to change the date of Australia Day.
5. Historians estimate that a maximum of 20,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were massacred during frontier wars.
6. Following Hawke's comments, the Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull released a video expressing his disappointment at those who want to change the date of Australia Day.
7. University of NSW law professor, Megan Davis, accuses the Prime Minister of lacking the courage to debate Australia's history openly.
8. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been opposing 26th January celebrations for over 100 years.
9. An Australian radio station used to hold its top 100 countdown on 26th January.
10. According to a newspaper poll, most people are in favour of changing the date of Australia Day.

Now watch the video released by Malcolm Turnbull and answer the questions below.

- a) How old is the Australian nation?
- b) Who are the Australia Day celebrations supposed to honour?
- c) What is a citizenship ceremony for?
- d) How does he define Australian values?
- e) How does he qualify the history of European settlement in Australia?
- f) What is the main reason to celebrate Australia Day?
- g) Why is he disappointed by those who want to change the date?

The Today Show presenter, Brooke Boney, is Channel Nine Breakfast TV's first Indigenous presenter.

Listen to an extract from the programme. What are her feelings about Australia and celebrating 26th January?

Discuss

1. Do you think the date of Australia Day should be changed? Why/why not?
2. Is it important for a nation to celebrate a national day at all? Why/why not?
3. How should a nation decide which date to celebrate as its national day?
4. What sort of events are worth commemorating on a national day?
5. What does your country's national day commemorate?
6. Do you think this is a suitable date to celebrate? Why/why not?
7. What do your country's national day celebrations consist of?