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Change the Date, but more importantly, change the decision on Uluru Statement



OPINION: Some may see Australia Day as a celebration of modern Australia, but at the heart of this modern country is the continued failure to hear Indigenous peoples, writes Eddie Synot.

By
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As another year begins, so too does another round of the callous politics of Australia Day.

To be clear, the date and nature of the celebration of Australia Day should change — The fact that it has not changed only indicates the failure of reconciliation politics in Australia to reform the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

More than that, however, the lack of change is an indictment on an Australian society that champions a particular kind of progressive politics, identifiable by its empty rhetoric and broken promises, while eschewing the fundamental structural reforms so desperately needed.

Change has been building. Over recent years more local governments have decided to move their Australia Day celebrations and citizenship ceremonies out of respect for Indigenous Australians, and that sentiment continues to grow.

Yet the push against this also grows. Just this weekend past, Prime Minister Scott Morrison issued another [directive to local governments](#) [<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/pm-morrison-rejects-claims-of-politicising-australia-day-citizenship-ceremonies>], threatening to strip their power to hold citizenship ceremonies if they do not follow the deemed proper celebration of Australia Day.

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'Lack of leadership': Naarm council disappointed in PM's Australia Day proposal

Both the Yarra City Council and Darebin City Council have hit back at Prime Minister Scott Morrison's recent announcements about Australia Day.

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'A day of sadness': Councils plan Australia Day date change ahead of January 26
A handful of councils will change their Australia Day celebrations from January 26.

It hasn't mattered that the [history of Australia Day is conflicted \[https://www.sbs.com.au/news/why-australia-day-is-really-held-on-26-january-and-the-push-to-change-the-date \]](https://www.sbs.com.au/news/why-australia-day-is-really-held-on-26-january-and-the-push-to-change-the-date), only becoming the modern celebration we know today during the 1990s. It has also not mattered that the legitimate demands of Indigenous Australians have always been about more than a demand to 'change the date'.

January 26 obviously symbolises more than Arthur Phillip striding ashore in 1788. While some see the day as a celebration of what Australia has become, others see the continued price paid by many, especially Indigenous Australians, for modern Australia to be what it is and the failure to reconcile with the truth of this history.

At the heart of this modern Australia is the continued failure to hear Indigenous Australians. Successive reports and investigations, in addition to the demand of Indigenous voices, have fallen on deaf ears at best, and deliberately ignorant and prejudiced ears at worst.

As a result, Indigenous Australians continue to endure the callous politics of reconciliation. Children are removed from their families at [record numbers \[https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-01-31/removing-children-indigenous-communities-national-disaster/9374866 \]](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-01-31/removing-children-indigenous-communities-national-disaster/9374866); Indigenous people are incarcerated and criminalised at [record rates \[https://theconversation.com/as-indigenous-incarceration-rates-keep-rising-justice-reinvestment-offers-a-solution-107610 \]](https://theconversation.com/as-indigenous-incarceration-rates-keep-rising-justice-reinvestment-offers-a-solution-107610), and Indigenous people practically receive death sentences for being [unable to pay a fine \[https://www.sbs.com.au/news/viral-campaign-to-free-jailed-indigenous-women-reaches-230-000 \]](https://www.sbs.com.au/news/viral-campaign-to-free-jailed-indigenous-women-reaches-230-000). Yet while increased numbers of organisations develop reconciliation action plans, Indigenous people continue to be told that more substantial change is impossible because things either do not work that way or will not be supported.

Here, the challenge of moving beyond January 26 is not resurgent neo-Nazis on Australian beaches or racist populists like Pauline Hanson, but the continued prevalence of support these extremists find in the political base of Australian society that continues to foothold the status quo. It is this base more than any other factor, a base that avoids fundamental questions of structural reform, that most stands in the way of moving beyond impotent reconciliation politics and stubborn symbols such as January 26.

This is where the real reform challenge lies. Levelled at all Australians, this challenge demands more than eloquent statements of reconciliation and commitments to changing the date. This challenge demands that Australians listen to and hear Indigenous voices. This challenge requires that Australians suspend their disbelief in politics and demand more from their politicians. Most of all, this challenge demands substantive structural reforms beyond the limitations of reconciliation politics.

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In this respect, it is welcome that the Australian Labor Party has committed to the implementation of reforms called for by the [Uluru Statement from the Heart \[https://www.referendumcouncil.org.au/sites/default/files/2017-05/Uluru_Statement_From_The_Heart_0.PDF \]](https://www.referendumcouncil.org.au/sites/default/files/2017-05/Uluru_Statement_From_The_Heart_0.PDF). Beyond rhetoric, these reforms promise the beginning of a process that will deliver substantial structural change.



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Indigenous leaders urge Australians to get behind Uluru Statement proposal
Former Referendum Council members insist community must support the council's final report calling for a constitutionally recognised Indigenous voice to parliament.
[\[/nitv/nitv-news/article/2017/06/22/uluru-statement-we-never-ceded-sovereignty-can-we-join-yours?cid=inbody:change-the-date-but-more-importantly-change-the-decision-on-uluru-statement \]](https://www.nitv.com.au/nitv-news/article/2017/06/22/uluru-statement-we-never-ceded-sovereignty-can-we-join-yours?cid=inbody:change-the-date-but-more-importantly-change-the-decision-on-uluru-statement)



The Uluru Statement: We never ceded sovereignty but can we join yours?

Comment: The Uluru statement from the heart is said to reflect an Indigenous rejection of a minimalist version of constitutional reform, but in fact, enshrines it.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart is a constitutional moment in the history of Australian society that calls for a fundamental restructuring of the culture of power and decision making that pervades Australian society. Calling for Voice, Treaty and Truth, the Uluru Statement from the Heart speaks from the legitimate place of Indigenous Australians as First Nations people and their rights that in here because of that status.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart is both a symbol and a platform of substantial reform that all Australians can get behind to achieve the substantive structural reform needed. The Uluru Statement from the Heart is something that can lead us beyond confected symbols such as Australia Day and overcome the empty rhetoric and broken promises of the politics of reconciliation.

The challenge and responsibility to achieve this promise of reform belongs to all Australians.

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