

A CONVERSATION ABOUT JANUARY 26 INTERIM FINDINGS **STAGE ONE & TWO**

28 February 2023



Image credit: Dr Jenny Murray-Jones

INTRODUCTION

Commencing in May 2022, the City of Greater Geelong started a conversation with and listening to local community about 26th of January - the day known as Australia Day.

The key purpose of this conversation has been to understand, respect and acknowledge the experiences and goals of First Nations Peoples while ensuring the wider community's voice is also heard on this matter.

For some people in our community, January 26 is a day to celebrate, while for many First Nations People it represents a day of mourning, sorrow and survival.

The City's Kilangitj Aboriginal Advisory Committee provides advice to Council on First Nations matters and requested that Council consider engaging with First Nations Peoples and the broader community about 26 January.

Thank you to everyone who shared feedback during the six-month conversation from May to November 2022.

We received very strong feedback to this engagement – 957 survey responses. This included 447 contributions from First Nations People, the largest number of contributions we have ever experienced from the First Nations community on any issue.

The engagement has occurred in two phases:

- Stage 1: Engagement with First Nations Peoples (May to December 2022)
- Stage 2: Engagement with the broader community (October to December 2022)

This is a report on what we have heard from First Nations People and the broader community.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

STAGE ONE



May to November
engagement (Stage one)



173
Surveys completed by First Nations people (hard copy and online)

2

First Nations Forums held

10

First Nations people participated in Forum discussions



9

print adverts in e-newsletters & City News

In-person

Engagement at Wathaurong NAIDOC week event and presentations to a range of First Nations groups

STAGE TWO



September to November
engagement (Stage two)



274
Surveys completed by First Nations Peoples and
454
broader community (hard copy and online)

2

Community Forums held

13

Community members participated in Forum discussions



8

print adverts in e-newsletters & City News

In-person

At the 2022 Geelong Show

Overall, the City received 957 survey responses (447 First Nations Peoples and 510 Broader Community) and held four community forums, with the engagement running over a six-month period. We thank everyone for their feedback it is greatly valued and will guide Council's decision-making regarding 26 January in the greater Geelong region.

During the first stage of engagement two First Nation forums were held in Corio and Central Geelong. A significant amount of surveys were completed through face-to-face discussions with community members and the HYS web page (with a strong preference for face-to-face consultation).

During the second stage of the engagement community forums were held at Wurriki Nyal, city of Greater Geelong offices. A significant amount of surveys continued to be received from First Nations People during this time (274) as well as 454 surveys online and in writing from the broader community.

WHAT WE'VE HEARD - THEMES

FIRST NATIONS PEOPLES - SURVEY RESULTS

STAGE ONE & TWO

Question 1: How do you feel about the 26 January?

We received very strong feedback on this first stage of engagement - the largest we have ever experienced from the First Nations community on any issue.

Almost half (45 per cent) of First Nations Peoples responding to the survey made it clear that the 26th of January was far from being a day of celebration and that change was needed.

Whilst just over half of the First Nation respondents stated clearly that this day should be formally acknowledged and recognised through ceremony and Cultural events and activities to share the diverse heritage of the First Nation Arts and Culture in greater Geelong.

Themes that emerged include:

A bad day: The majority of responses expressed the 26th of January as “a bad day”. This encompassed key sentiments such as “a hard day” and “a lonely day”. Adding to this were key words such as “suffering”, “sorrow”, “painful” and “traumatic”. Many responses emphasised the clear feeling of division resulting from the 26th of January celebrations with results that include “a White Day”, “not for us”, “can’t celebrate” and “Colonisation”.

Just a day off: There were many comments that indicate neutral feelings and even ambivalence, such as “feel nothing”, “don’t care” or “just a public holiday”.

A good day: A smaller number of responses reflected positive attitudes, with statements such as “love it”, “enjoy the holiday” and “fun at Rippleside”.

Question 2:

How can we be more inclusive of First Nation heritage and other communities in Greater Geelong?

It is important to note that survey responses had a strong emphasis on the need for culture, with key themes of “recognition”, “traditional ceremonies” and “cultural heritage”.

Recognition: Recognition was a strong theme, underpinned by comments such as “better education”, “Black Lives Matter” and “Truth-telling”.

Events: There were many suggestions for Council to support First Nations events that embrace music, markets, dance, arts and indigenous sport.

Change the date: Even with this question there were clear calls for “change the date”, “day of mourning” and “apology”.

Youth and family: This was a strong sentiment, supported by comments such as “family day”, and even “skateboard competition”.

Question 3:

Following this 6-month community conversation engagement, what would you hope council could deliver or put in place?

Only 55% of respondents answered this question. Of those that did, about half indicated nothing/nil/no, and about half called for cultural acknowledgement.

BROADER COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

STAGE TWO

We received a good number of responses from the broader community, who were first asked to review the First Nations Peoples feedback in the Engagement Summary Stage One before sharing their views.

Question 1: How do you feel about the 26 January?

We received a range of views in the feedback from the broader community for this question, and while the overwhelming responses were sadness and negative feelings about 26 January and a desire to see changes made, there was feedback too from those who felt that 26 January was a day for fun and celebration, time with family. Some believe the day should not change.

And, while the City did not ask about the suitability of the date for Australia Day (as it is a Federal Government set public holiday), the highest repeated response in the feedback from the broader community was to 'change the date', followed by 'not a day for celebration'.

Themes that emerged include:

Negative feelings: where people felt 'distressed', 'uncomfortable' and 'ashamed' and that the day is 'not respectful' to or does 'not acknowledge' Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Positive feelings: There was recognition that January 26 is 'culturally significant', a 'day for everyone' and a 'great opportunity'.

For change: There was a significant proportion of the feedback included sentiment accepting that change needs to take place or requesting change, to 'acknowledge the past', 'be more inclusive' and a common statement was to 'change the date'.

Against change: While a smaller proportion of the feedback, there was sentiment too that this conversation 'creates division', the day should be 'left alone' and that we 'can't undo the past'.

Question 2:

How can we be more inclusive of First Nation heritage and other communities in Greater Geelong?

The most prominent theme to emerge in the feedback to this question was to 'listen to/include and acknowledge Aboriginal people' with 'change the date' again being strongly emphasised then there was an opposing commentary that more inclusiveness was 'not needed'.

Events and activities: activities were strongly identified as a way to be more inclusive with 'celebrate aboriginal people', 'learn local history/local stories' as well as suggestions for 'dawn service', 'First Nations ceremonies' and 'day of mourning'. There was also feedback around including indigenous language and truth-telling.

Recognition: 'Acknowledging the past' featured strongly in comments along with suggestions for recognition, such as 'plaques', 'memorials', 'Aboriginal place names' and greater use of 'Acknowledgement of Country'.

Wants and wishes: There were suggestions and requests about inclusive celebration 'acknowledging all cultures' and also for being 'respectful and acknowledging'. Feedback also asked for 'more education', and for Council to 'listen to Aboriginal people'. Again there was a strong theme requesting 'change the date'.

Against change: As with question one, there is also a theme opposing change, that we 'can't undo the past', 'we are one people' and that more inclusion is 'not needed'.

Question 3:

Following this 6-month community conversation engagement, what would you hope council could deliver or put in place?

Differing from First Nations People Feedback, where the majority of respondents did not see a role for Council, the broader community had many suggestions. From 'day of mourning' to a host of events and activities such as 'cultural events and information', 'education' as well as suggestions to 'leave it alone' and 'don't change'.

Inclusion: this is a strong theme with 'acknowledge all cultures', 'celebrate Aboriginal culture' and 'celebrate all cultures'. As well as inclusion of Aboriginal culture through 'changing place/suburb names' 'employ Aboriginal people' and 'elect First Nations People to council'.

Change/don't change: Again as the with previous two questions, there are two key sentiments presenting in the broader community feedback with one being for council to make 'no change' and 'keep the date' and then the larger number of responders calling for council to 'change the date', to create a 'new celebration day' or hold 'no celebration'.

OVERALL SURVEY SUMMARY

As all the feedback shared via the surveys in both Stage One and Stage Two was in commentary long-form, respondents had the opportunity to share more than one idea in response to questions. Therefore the results and themes above reflect the number of 'ideas' rather than the number of people.

To provide clarity on the balance of the two main opposing views which are those "for change" and those "opposing change" by number of respondents is as follows:

- 100% for change/change is needed - First Nations Peoples
- 0% opposing change/not accepting change is needed - First Nations Peoples
- 68% for change/accepting change is needed – Broader Community
- 32% opposing change/not accepting change is needed – Broader Community

FORUM DISCUSSIONS - STAGE ONE (FIRST NATIONS PEOPLES)

Two small forums with First Nations Peoples during Stage one, allowed for discussion of the survey results and key questions. The themes that emerged are summarised below.

History: "We can't celebrate the successes without first understanding the despair"

There are many painful stories of the history of Geelong, from colonisation and the Frontier Wars, to the Stolen Generations.

Reclamation: "If we can't change the date – let's change the focus"

Recognise it as the day of colonisation and put First Nations voices and stories first. First Nations people want to reclaim their story and share their history.

Wider Change: "There is a groundswell of change"

There is a wider shift in focus for January 26 already occurring and it is time for Geelong to change too. There is momentum at the state and federal level for greater recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including the commitment to the Uluru Statement from the Heart. Other councils are changing, and other big organisations in Geelong are changing too.

Showing respect on 26 January: First Nations acknowledgement and stories

Start with a Dawn Ceremony at the Waterfront with a Cleansing of Country and a minute's silence. It could be followed by Dance and/or a march. Share history and stories. It would be an inclusive gathering of all First Nations communities and non-Indigenous allies and family. Invite schools, invite other agencies. Invite new citizens and welcome them to the land. The afternoon could move to a celebration of cultural diversity.

The second forum also called for a statement of commitment from Council to the First Nations communities and Traditional Owners (broader than January 26).

FORUM DISCUSSIONS - STAGE TWO (FIRST NATIONS PEOPLES)

Two forums were also held with the broader community during Stage two, where the First Nations Peoples feedback was shared with the attendees and then the key questions discussed. The themes that emerged are summarised below.

History: "26 January is not an inclusive date"

Participants shared that they haven't acknowledged Jan 26 for 5/10/15 years (multiple mentions) It's been a learning process – slow change. A national day is needed – we want to celebrate and be proud of being

Australian – but it has to be an inclusive date. 26 January is not an inclusive date. (multiple mentions) ‘If we’re going to call it Australia Day it should be inclusive of everybody.’ ‘We don’t know what it means to celebrate Australia. So we can’t do it.’ ‘Within my family and friends, we all feel it’s inappropriate.’

Change the date (13 of the 14 participants expressed that they wanted a different date to celebrate Australia Day)

Inclusiveness: “Listen to First Nations Peoples”

Belief that a Citizenship ceremony and ‘citizen re-commitment ceremony’ held with First Nations Traditional Owners welcoming people to the land would be more inclusive. Separate the concept of British Australia Day from Australians’ Australia Day. We need greater awareness and education. (multiple mentions) “Listen to First Nations Peoples”

A way to move forward together: “Need greater awareness and education”

Separate the concept of British Australia Day from Australians’ Australia Day. We need greater awareness and education. (multiple mentions). Hold a morning event – start with First Nations. Sombre, acknowledging, like ANZAC day. Afternoon – celebrate all cultures.

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NEXT STEPS

The *Kilangitj* Aboriginal Advisory Committee, which advises Council on First Nations matters, will be provided the community feedback and final engagement report for review and an opportunity to assess recommendations to Council for consideration.

Recommendations from this engagement will be presented to Council at an ordinary meeting in the near future to guide the City’s future approach to activities and commemorations held on 26 January.