



Mr Brian Wilson
Community Services Directorate
Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
GPO Box 158
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Mr Wilson

A DAY TO CELEBRATE RECONCILIATION—HAVE YOUR SAY COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on replacing the Family and Community Day or the Queen’s Birthday with a permanent Reconciliation Day to commence in 2017.

This submission will:

1. Commend the ACT Government for its good progress towards reconciliation, noting in particular the governments strong policy stance on this issue and its collaborative relationship with the local indigenous community
2. Note the benefits of greater recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for both the local indigenous population and broader community
3. Briefly highlight international examples of governmental recognition of local indigenous people, and note how these examples could be adopted by the ACT Government when establishing a permanent Reconciliation Day
4. Provide suggestions regarding the planning and implementation of the proposed Reconciliation Day

1. ACT Government progress towards reconciliation

I commend the ACT Government for its thorough recognition of the Ngunnawal people as the traditional custodians of the ACT and surrounding region. In particular I would like to acknowledge the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (part of the Community Services Directorate) which provides strategic advice to the Chief Minister on issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in the ACT, and provides secretariat and administrative support to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Consultative Council and the United Ngunnawal Elders Council.

2. Benefits of recognition

The ACT Government's efforts to partner with the local indigenous community continue to deliver a number of positive outcomes, for both the indigenous population and the broader community. These outcomes include:

- Greater formal protection of Aboriginal heritage and cultural sites such as the Yankee hat rock art site
- Improved access to education and support for students, delivered through grants, scholarships and support programs
- Dedicated programs for health and justice
- Preservation of indigenous knowledge and practices - the ACT Government Murumbung Rangers program facilitates the maintenance of local indigenous culture by incorporating traditional fire management practices into general practice

3. International examples of governmental recognition of local indigenous people

There are a number of international examples of well established reconciliation or recognition commemorative days for indigenous peoples. These days aim to celebrate the unique heritage, diverse cultures and outstanding achievements of such local indigenous populations, and are often combined with celebrations of the broader community. Notable examples include:

- *Canada* - celebrates *National Aboriginal Day* and the unique heritage, diverse cultures and outstanding achievements of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples in Canada on June 21 each year. The day is part of a series of celebrations of cultures culminating in Canada Day on 1 July.
- *New Zealand* – celebrates *Waitangi Day* to commemorate the signing of New Zealand's founding document - the Treaty of Waitangi - in 1840. Events are held to promote local indigenous culture and acknowledge the shared history of the indigenous people and the broader community.

Both Canada and New Zealand's commemorative days emphasize the positive contributions that indigenous communities make to the broader population. The ACT Government should consider how international approaches to reconciliation celebrations could be adapted for our region.

4. Planning and implementation of the proposed Reconciliation Day

Selecting an appropriate date for the proposed Reconciliation Day


I note the following relevant commemorative days:

- *National Sorry Day* – 26 May
 - The day before National Reconciliation Week, National Sorry Day is commemorated nationally to remember and honour the Stolen Generations.
- *Reconciliation Week* - May 27 to June 3
 - May 27 is the anniversary of the 1967 referendum in which more than 90 per cent of Australians voted 'Yes' to count Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the census and give the Australian Government the power to make laws for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

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- June 3 marks the historic 1992 Mabo decision in which the High Court of Australia recognised native title – the recognition that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights over their lands did survive British colonisation.

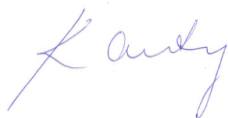
Noting the confluence of the above dates, I offer my support for the date of the proposed Reconciliation Day of 29th May to replace Family and Community Day.

Involvement of the community in delivery of the Day and associated events

In keeping with the ACT Governments *ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2015-2018*, the ACT Government should ensure wherever possible that indigenous members of the local community take the lead roles in designing programs, events, and activities for the proposed Reconciliation Day.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide my views as part of the community consultation on this issue.

Yours sincerely



Dr Kate Auty

Commissioner for Sustainability
and the Environment

8 July 2016

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