

Moreland City Council keeps citizenship ceremony, dumps Australia Day

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A third Melbourne council has voted to dump Australia Day out of respect for Aboriginal people months after councillors rejected a motion to move citizenship ceremonies from January 26.

Moreland City Council, at a meeting on Wednesday night, voted to drop any reference to Australia Day on January 26.



Moreland councillor Samantha Ratnam with Greens leader Richard Di Natale

The vote follows two other controversial decisions by Yarra and Darebin councils to move their citizenship ceremonies away from Australia Day.

Councillor Samantha Ratnam said Moreland would now join forces with Yarra and Darebin council to lobby the federal government to switch Australia Day nationally from January 26, a date that marks the arrival of the First Fleet from England.



Moreland City Council has voted to dump Australia Day.

"This isn't about banning barbecues, it's about respect for the world's oldest living culture," she said. "I'm proud of council for taking this step."

Cr Ratnam said the motion wasn't about erasing history, but acknowledging "the full story of our country".

"Thousands of Australians like me want to celebrate Australia Day - just not on a day that is painful for others," she said.

"We stand with Yarra and Darebin in taking leadership on the change the date campaign. This is a gesture of respect and an important step in healing. It means a lot to many people. Change has to start somewhere and I'm sure other councils will soon follow."

Cr Ratnam said while the motion had the overwhelming support of the community, some remained opposed to it.

"There were views on both sides, but ultimately we made a decision, with most councillors and members of the public firmly on board."

She went on to take at aim those who "have hidden behind anonymous email addresses and blocked numbers" to leave her abusive messages, including one person who she said told her to go back to her homeland of Sri Lanka.

However, unlike Yarra and Darebin, Moreland will still hold citizenship ceremonies on January 26, honouring a previous council decision.

An earlier proposal to change the date of Moreland's January 26 citizenship ceremony out of respect for the Aboriginal community was voted down in June.

At the time, councillor Annalivia Carli Hannan said removing ceremonies might create a greater gap in the community.

"My concern with this new direction is that it's pitting our marginalised first nation people against our marginalised new migrant community," she said.

In 2015, Moreland moved its annual citizen awards ceremony from January 26 to October out of respect for Indigenous people. The federal government last month stripped Yarra and Darebin councils of their right to host citizenship ceremonies after successful votes to shift them to another day.

Last week, far-right protesters stormed a Yarra Council meeting in opposition to its Australia Day ban.

A senior Yarra council officer revealed extra security, including a police presence, was arranged for an internal council meeting held on Wednesday night.

"This action has been taken as a caution in light of the incident at the recent council meeting and the ongoing social media references suggesting that the subject of council's decision on January 26 remains in dispute with certain groups," the officer said.