

‘Most of this is about education’: CA Indigenous advisor firm on Australia Day change



January 26 has becoming an increasingly divisive date for Australia's national day.

By Daniel Brettig
December 26,

As Scott Boland joined Jason Gillespie, Aunty Faith Thomas and Ash Gardner as Australia's Aboriginal Test cricketers, Cricket Australia's Indigenous advisory co-chair Justin Mohamed explained the decision to move away from referring to January 26 as "Australia Day".

CA's decision to remove references to the national day, out of respect for a growing tide of dissatisfaction with the date among Indigenous and non-white Australian communities, was criticised last year by the prime minister Scott Morrison, among others.

State associations and Big Bash League clubs were less than universal in their enthusiasm either, with the South Australian Cricket Association particularly vocal in opposition to the move. This year, the BBL final will take place on January 26, and Mohamed said conversations about how to handle the day were continuing.

"Last year the decision was made, and with most things that are new there's always the criticism that people didn't know, or I didn't know about it," Mohamed said. "But you have to start somewhere - if ever there's a change in the workplace, there's always that

initial reaction. What we did learn from last year is we've got to communicate, and that communication's a lot stronger now.

"Most of this is about education, there's not too many people who will sit back and go, 'No, we shouldn't be doing it'. There's always a few that will be there, but the majority say, 'Let's make sure this is inclusive', and we can play games on the 26th, but not do it in the face of not acknowledging that the 26th has different meanings and represents different things, especially for First Nations people."

A move to broaden the remit of the Indigenous advisory council - with representatives from each of the six states plus the CA director Mel Jones as co-chair with Mohamed - has seen it offer opinions on a range of topics, including the choices of possible sponsors.

"Our role as the council is to provide a bit of a reminder that some decisions and actions have a ripple effect, and to ensure at CA that ripple effect is a positive one, not a negative," Mohamed said.

"Some of the things we have looked at, like the 26th of January and where does that sit, [are] things around some of the key sponsors of cricket and what they're doing outside of cricket; The Dan Murphy's being established in Darwin right next to an Aboriginal community.

"It's not saying we demand them to do anything, but it's just saying, 'You need to be aware, and this is our view', and hopefully, they take that on board."

Advertisement

The BBL has an Indigenous round from January 8-13 this year, and Mohamed noted parallels with how the AFL's recognition of the Aboriginal contribution to the game had taken time and leadership from individual clubs to grow.

"We've seen that with other sports - people forget many years ago that Richmond was the only team in the AFL that had an Indigenous jumper," he said. "The Dreamtime at the MCG game was a concept made up between two clubs, but then it turns into the Indigenous round and that flows. So, it takes time, and we've broken the ice on it.

"CA's worked a lot on getting that communication and having those conversations. It's a journey we have to walk together as a nation, and CA's doing that at the moment with its footprint around what happens on that particular day."