

## Taungurung Statement on January 26

While many Australian's believe January 26 (Australia Day) is a celebration of all the things we love about Australia: land, sense of fair go, lifestyle, democracy, the freedoms we enjoy but particularly the celebration of people and culture, the Taungurung people don't share this view.

For the Taungurung people, January 26 celebrates the colonisation/invasion of our lands and the lands of Traditional owner Nations across this continent. It celebrates the suppression of Taungurung language and culture, the incarceration and genocide of our people, and is an annual reminder of the dispossession of our people and the ensuing systemic and institutional racism which continues to this day.

In the 2018 Taungurung Recognition and Settlement Agreement (RSA), the State Government of Victoria (the State) formerly recognised the devastating impact of colonisation upon Taungurung people, and the role that the State played in dispossessing Taungurung people of our Country. The State also acknowledged the continued suffering of the Taungurung people through the implementation of laws and policies that discriminated against us in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

These far-reaching laws and policies fragmented both our families and community. Beginning in the nineteenth century, Taungurung children were forcibly taken from parents, in one of the most traumatic examples of State policy and practice. Depending on how the State defined Aboriginality over time, Taungurung people could either be forced to live on a reserve or, under what came to be known as the Half Caste Act of 1886, forcibly evicted from a reserve, and prevented from living with our families. Other laws regulated Aboriginal marriages and employment. These laws and policies, including under the State's assimilationist efforts in the twentieth century, ensured that Taungurung people were excluded from the life of the nation, the intrinsic value of our culture and our identity denied.

The State formerly acknowledged that the actions of early colonists on Taungurung country including the deliberate killing of Taungurung people. The State also recognises the deadly and widespread impact of foreign diseases upon the Taungurung population, and the hunger experienced by our people who were no longer able to sustain themselves on Taungurung lands.

The Taungurung people continue to experience the ongoing effects and the impact of colonisation near on 190 years later. This is seen through the continued dispossession of lands, denial of inherent rights, intergenerational trauma and institutional structures designed to negate and restrict.



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From the very beginning, however, our people fought to survive. In the early days of colonisation, when sheep and cattle destroyed our traditional food sources, the Taungurung people took livestock and destroyed crops to push pastoralists from our lands. The Taungurung people never accepted that the colonists owned our country. The Taungurung people signed no treaties, nor took any action to relinquish our sovereignty.

Though Taungurung people were forced to find sanctuary at stations and missions such as Mitchelstown and Murchison, the Taungurung also fought to maintain connection to our Country. In 1859, a group of Taungurung men – Bear-ring, Mur-rum-Mur-rum, Parn-gean, Bur-rip-pin and Koo-yarn – petitioned the colonial government for land in their own country where they could grow crops, but where they could also continue to maintain their traditional ways of obtaining food. This stands as one of the earliest examples in Australia of Aboriginal people taking direct political action for the return of their land. Their appeal resulted in the Central Board appointed to watch over the interests Aboriginies (Aboriginal Protectorate) approving the Taungurung people’s selection of and then surveying of land at a place they called ‘Nakkrom’ on the Acheron River near Alexandra. At the time Guardian of Aborigines William Thomas described location as the ‘Promised Land’ of the Taungurung people.

Despite the land being approved by the Aboriginal Protectorate and the Board of Land & Works, there was strong resistance by pastoralists. Our people were later driven off our ‘Promised Land’ by the local pastoralists. Denied a realistic alternative, most Taungurung survivors later joined other Kulin peoples at Coranderrk Station, on Woiwurrung country. Over time, our people moved to mission stations and reserves elsewhere in Victoria – to Lake Tyers, Lake Condah, Franklinford, and Ebenezer – or to Cumberagunga in New South Wales. A number of Taungurung people, however, refused to leave our own Country, and remained there for the rest of their lives. Some found work within the colonial economy, including on local pastoral stations such as Molka, Wappan and Doogalook, as a way of staying on Taungurung land. One Taungurung man even took up a selection on his own country in 1879, when it was rare for Aboriginal people to gain leaseholds. The Taungurung’s push to retain, and reclaim, their country continued.

Through much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the State actively discouraged the practice of Taungurung culture. Despite this, our people continued to pass down knowledge via family and community gatherings, out of view of the wider community. In 1967, Camp Jungai was established near Alexandra, just south of Lake Eildon, in the heart of Taungurung Country. Named using the Taungurung word for meeting place, Camp Jungai became a place where culture would thrive, and continues to this day.



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In the eyes of the Taungurung peoples, Australia Day ignores our history, our struggle, and the fact that our ancestors have lived on, cared for, and maintained cultural obligations to and for Taungurung Country for over 65,000 years.

It is for this reason that many Taungurung people call Australia Day, Invasion Day, as a reflection on the effects invasion had and still has on our community and Country. Taungurung people also refer to Australia Day as Survival Day, a day to reflect on our resilience and survival, and our continued determination and drive to exercise our cultural and inherent rights, and our continued fight for and assertion of rights on Taungurung land.

Moreover, January 26 has a long history of protest within the Aboriginal Community. On 26 January 1888, on the centenary of British colonisation, Aboriginal leaders boycotted the 100-year anniversary celebrations.

On 26 January 1938, on the 150th anniversary of Arthur Phillip's arrival, Yorta Yorta man William Cooper and other members of the Aboriginal Progressive Association held the Day of Mourning and Protest. The protest took place in Sydney after an event to celebrate Arthur Phillip's landing, which included a parade and a re-enactment of the First Fleet's arrival. Afterwards, over 1000 First Nations people and their supporters formed a silent march through the streets of Sydney.

All this history of Aboriginal resilience, mourning and protest on January 26 and yet January 26 only became a national celebration in 1988.

Taungurung people therefore continue to see January 26 as a day of mourning and reflection, and not a day of celebration.

It is Taungurung peoples wish that all people living on our Country take time to truly acknowledge and respect that 26 January does not bring a sense of unity and pride and implores people to educate themselves about the true history of this Country and to consider what you can do to become an ally of the Taungurung people.

The easiest way to be an ally of Taungurung people is to engage in the Yoorrook truth telling process (<https://yoorrookjusticecommission.org.au/>), share these resources with others and start conversations with friends and family on what you have learnt through the process.

The Taungurung Land & Waters Council, through the direction of the Taungurung people have chosen not to participate in any activities associated with January 26 and request that our partners and stakeholders respect this position.



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It is important to note the Taungurung people respect our partners/stakeholders' responsibilities and commitments to January 26, however, also request they frequently consider deeply the views of the Taungurung Nation and the actual need to continue celebrating a day which would continue to isolate and segregate the Taungurung people on their own Country.



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