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## The Government and national symbols

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Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser wanted to encourage greater community involvement in Australia Day. The organisation of commemorative events was fragmented and most Australians saw Australia Day as an opportunity for a long weekend rather than a celebration. The focus on the arrival of Governor Phillip in Sydney meant that the day had little significance for Indigenous people, non-British migrants, and people who lived in South and Western Australia. Cabinet decided on 13 March 1979 (Decisions 7565 and 7780, not printed here) to establish a new national Australia Day Committee to encourage a greater range of celebratory events. However, Anzac Day was not seen as a viable replacement for Australia Day, in part because Anzac Day was itself considered to be in decline (Submission 2976).

Cabinet received a complaint that customs duty and sales tax were imposed on imported photographs of the Queen. It decided that locally-made photographs of the Queen were readily available and that it was not prepared to support the legislation and Industries Assistance Commission inquiry that would be needed to remove the duty and tax from the imports (Decision 9805(IP)).

Cabinet considered the always delicate issue of how far advertisements about government programs could be appropriately funded by the taxpayer. It decided that such expenditure would be legitimate where it was non-political in nature and provided relevant information to the public (Decision 9811).

### **Selected documents**

Submission 2976, Observance of Australia Day	10
Decision 9805(IP), Duty on imported photographs of the Queen	17
Decision 9811, Advertising government expenditures and activities	18

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Submission No. 2976  
Copy No. 54

**FOR CABINET**

Title	Observance of Australia Day							
Minister	Prime Minister							
Purpose/Issues	Cabinet agreed in Decision No. 7565 that there should be more emphasis on observance of Australia Day as the focus of national celebration and feeling and that a paper be prepared with this in mind.							
Relation to existing policy	Nil							
Legislation involved	Nil							
Urgency: Critical/significant dates	Cabinet asked for this paper to be prepared as soon as possible. An early decision is required if the Committee is to be established and in operation in time to have an impact on the observance of Australia Day in 1980.							
Consultation: Ministers/Depts consulted	Departments of Home Affairs and Finance							
Is there agreement?	No. Agreement with Home Affairs but not Finance.							
Cost	Nil							
. this focal year	<table style="border: none;"> <tr> <td style="padding-right: 10px;">\$150,000</td> <td style="font-size: 2em; padding: 0 5px;">}</td> <td rowspan="3">                     These additional funds should be appropriated to the Department of Home Affairs and they have therefore been included in the Minister for Home Affairs Submission on New Policy Proposals - 1979.                 </td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-right: 10px;">. year 2</td> <td style="font-size: 2em; padding: 0 5px;">}</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-right: 10px;">. year 3</td> <td style="font-size: 2em; padding: 0 5px;">}</td> </tr> </table>	\$150,000	}	These additional funds should be appropriated to the Department of Home Affairs and they have therefore been included in the Minister for Home Affairs Submission on New Policy Proposals - 1979.	. year 2	}	. year 3	}
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. year 3	}							

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Public Presentation - Minister's Proposals

1. (a) When and where is the decision to be announced?	By the Prime Minister in a press statement.
(b) Is a draft press statement attached?	Yes
(c) How widely is the announcement to be circulated?	As widely as possible
2. (a) Is a press conference considered necessary?	Yes
(b) What media opportunities will be taken?	Nil
3. What supplementary material is required for backgrounding journalists, Members and special interest groups?	Nil
4. (a) What prior consultation with State Governments or other official bodies is required?	Premiers will need to be informed of the creation of a new National Committee and that it will be preparing a paper on the fixing of observance of Australia Day on 26 January.
(b) Which special interest groups should be advised of the announcement?	Existing Australia Day Councils
5. What general or sectional support can be expected?	Widespread
6. What criticism is anticipated and how will it be answered?	<p>Aboriginals might criticise the celebration of Australia Day as a reminder of the interruption to their traditional way of life. This could be countered by making the emphasis of Australia Day the emergence of our nationhood, not the arrival of Captain Phillip.</p> <p>Criticism could be forthcoming from existing Australia Day Councils if they do not see a role for themselves in the new arrangements. Early consultation should avoid this.</p>

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### BACKGROUND

1. 26 January was observed as a holiday from 1838 until 1933 and was called either Foundation Day or Anniversary Day. It became Australia Day in 1933 when it was gazetted under this title.
2. The observance of the holiday on the Monday closest to 26 January has been the subject of debate for many years. The present arrangement was implemented after discussions over several years in Premiers' Conferences in the 1930's.
3. During 1973 and 1974 attempts were made by the previous Government to create greater interest and involvement in Australia Day. These had limited success.
4. Cabinet agreed on 27 January 1977 (Decision No. 2145) "that consideration should be given in the appropriate forum to the Australia Day holiday being held on 26 January in future years to emphasise the significance of the occasion". As a result the matter was discussed at the Premiers' Conference in April 1977.
5. The transcript shows:

Mr Fraser - The proposal came up that the Australia Day holiday should always be on Australia Day to give greater significance to Australia Day. Of course, there is a long weekend at the end of January. It has become the traditional time for a number of events which might be upset if there was not a long weekend.

Mr Bjelke-Petersen - It is not a holiday. It is supposed to be Australia Day. That is why we get very few people there on Australia Day - They are all away. So why have Australia Day when you find there is not a great deal of interest in it.

Mr Vran - We will not be changing it in New South Wales.

Mr Fraser - I suppose that most States want to continue with that position.

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Mr Dunstan - Yes.

Mr Hamer - Yes.

6. During 1978 the Premiers of Victoria and Tasmania were reported in the press as having suggested reverting back to the actual date.

7. The Defence Force currently have an active involvement in Australia Day celebrations. (See Attachment C.)

### CONSIDERATION OF THE ISSUES

8. Australians should have a specific day every year on which they can celebrate the emergence of their nationhood. The only appropriate day appears to be 26 January which is the day of the arrival of the first white settlers. However, there could be multi-million dollar costs to industry if observance of Australia Day is changed to 26 January, for example, absenteeism on Mondays and Fridays when 26 January falls on a Tuesday or Thursday and an additional shutdown for industry when it falls during the week.

9. There are currently Australia Day Councils in four States and the A.C.T. (Councils in each State were established with the assistance of the Australian Natives Association but they no longer operate in New South Wales, where festivities are now organised by the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority, and Western Australia.) These bodies and organisations such as Apex Clubs and Good Neighbour Councils have had limited success in recent years in arousing interest and participation in Australia Day celebrations.

10. There is a non-government national Australia Day Council in existence, but it does not appear to be active. An indication of lack of coordination at the national level is that the Councils in the A.C.T. and Victoria each name their own 'Australian of the Year'.

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11. The emphasis in existing celebrations has been to commemorate the landing of Governor Phillip in Sydney Cove. This has little appeal for large sections of the community such as non-British migrants and Aborigines. Furthermore, this present emphasis could explain the limited interest of people living in South and Western Australia.

12. Anzac Day has in the past probably been closer than Australia Day to a day on which Australians celebrate the emergence of their nationhood as everyone, regardless of ancestry or background, could commemorate the courage and achievements of those who fought to preserve the freedom of this country. In recent years, however, there has been a decline in the numbers attending processions and memorial services due in part to the ageing of ex-service persons and to a change in attitude to the commemoration of warfare. In addition, Anzac Day means little to the many recently arrived immigrants from non-British backgrounds. Anzac Day is not a substitute for Australia Day.

13. A new national Australia Day Committee should be created by the Federal Government to advise on and coordinate efforts to foster observance of Australia Day through existing Australia Day organizations and other organizations such as cultural, historical, ethnic, sporting, children's and youth groups. The Committee's prime function should be to stimulate these groups to organize functions and events as their contribution to the celebration of Australia Day. It should not be actually involved in the organization of celebrations and other events on Australia Day. However, it could, as necessary, coordinate efforts and help publicize celebrations and functions.

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## FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

14. \$150,000 is estimated to be necessary in 1979-80 to permit the Committee to publicise its existence and its objectives and to promote particular events that have the potential for involving a wide section of the community and for once-only encouragement grants. Travel costs for the Committee and a secretariat (which would be located in the Department of Home Affairs) and sitting fees for the Committee members are included in this amount. The cost would decline substantially in subsequent years as less encouragement grants would be necessary.

## COMMONWEALTH, STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

15. These are important as cooperation at all levels of government will be necessary to establish and maintain contacts with groups and organisations at the national, State and local government levels. To this end the Committee members should be selected on the basis of regional representation as well as community interests.

## CONSULTATION

16. Finance considers that, if Ministers agree to the establishment of the Committee, its functions should be solely advisory. More particularly, Finance questions the desirability of empowering the Committee to make grants or to finance particular activities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

17. I recommend that -

- (a) A new National Australia Day Committee responsible to the Minister for Home Affairs be set up to advise on and coordinate efforts to foster the observance of Australia

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Day through existing Australia Day organisations and other organisations such as cultural, historical, ethnic, sporting, children's and youth groups.

- (b) The Committee comprise 9 to 11 members selected from as wide a spectrum of the community as possible with particular emphasis on regional representation and community interests.
- (c) Additional funds of \$150,000 in 1979-80 and \$75,000 in 1980-81 be appropriated to the Department of Home Affairs.
- (d) The Committee be asked as a matter of urgency to advise on whether Australia Day should be celebrated each year on 26 January or on the nearest Monday as at present. In doing so it should consult widely to ascertain the costs of such a change.
- (e) Anzac Day be not considered as an alternative for Australia Day.

(Malcolm Fraser)

26 February 1979.

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C A B I N E T M I N U T E

Industry Policy Committee

Gambarra, 29 August 1979

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Decision No. 9805(IP)

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Without Submission - Duty on Imported Photographs of the Queen

The Committee:

- (a) noted that the Minister for Business and Consumer Affairs had received representations relating to the duty and sales tax currently payable on imported photographs of The Queen;
- (b) noted that the duty and tax could not be removed without an inquiry by the Industries Assistance Commission and legislation;
- (c) noted that Australian-made prints are readily available; and
- (d) endorsed the Minister's intention to take no action to vary the current arrangements.

  
Committee Secretary

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### C A B I N E T M I N U T E

Canberra, 30 August 1979

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Decision No. 9811

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Without Submission - Advertising Government Expenditures  
and Activities

The Cabinet agreed that :-

- (a) from time to time it would be appropriate for the Government to place special advertisements, supplementing normal departmental publicity, on the existence, size and purposes of major Government expenditures and activities (such as social welfare programs, employment programs, and activities arising from Defence expenditures);
- (b) the Ministerial Public Information Committee, in consultation with the relevant Minister, ensure that any such advertising is purely factual in content;
- (c) such advertising, being designed to provide relevant information to the public and being non-political in nature, would entail a legitimate use of public funds;
- (d) the proposed advertisement on the disposition of revenue from the 1979/80 Budget be framed in the light of the guidelines at sub-paragraphs (b) and (c) above; and

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Decision No. 9811 (contd.)

- (e) the above points be drawn upon in answering any questions that might arise in relation to these matters.

*M. Codd*

for Secretary to Cabinet

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