



## QAI Statement on January 26

QAI respectfully acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples and the Owners/Custodians of the land on which we work and live. We recognise the important role they have within community and country and pay our respects to the Elders of this land past, present and future.

QAI also recognises First Nations Australians with disability and the intersectional disadvantage they experience in the form of ableism and racism.

We acknowledge the tremendous hurt and mourning of First Nations peoples on the 26th of January.

Luke Pearson, a Gamilaroi man and author of *IndigenousX*, says this clearly, “The 26th of January is a day that will always live in infamy. It is not a date that will ever be forgotten. It will always be Invasion Day, Survival Day, a Day of Mourning. It will always be the day that the First (not really) Fleet came to Australia. It will always be a day of protest for as long as there are things that need to be protested against”.

We turn our attention today to the over-representation of First Nations peoples in custody, acute mental health units, forensic settings, and children in out of home care. We notice the disproportionate incarceration of First Nations people with disability, many of whom are detained far from their family and cultural networks. We further notice that many of the institutions in which our First Nations people with disability are detained and segregated are not culturally or disability aware or responsive, which can lead to additional and grave human rights violations. We acknowledge the systematic racism, genocide, and the disrespect and plunder of the land which sustains some of the oldest living cultures on the planet. We recognise the survival and strength of First Nations Peoples.

Bryan Andy, a Yorta Yorta man from Cummeragunja says, “There’s a saying that white Australia has a black history. It can sort of be taken in the sense that it has been a dark or unfortunate history, but it’s also true in the sense that we were here first. Sometimes people think that Australia started 200 years ago with the invasion.”



There are many reasons QAI is not celebrating today. QAI provides individual legal and non-legal advocacy and systems advocacy for people with disability and mental illness. Many of the people who access our services are in mental health settings, prisons, group homes, or hospitals. While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples make up about 3.3% of the population in “Australia” (ABS 2019), 11% of the people who access QAI’s services identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are ten times more likely to be imprisoned than non-Indigenous people. As of 30 June 2018, 1745 per 100,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were in prison, compared to 175 per 100,000 non-Indigenous people.

Highlighting the incarceration and over-representation of First Nations Australians in institutions of government control is necessary to expose the pervasive reach and impact of colonisation. But only telling the negative part of the story, however, eclipses the story of a collective survival of rich cultures, languages, and stories that have been passed down intergenerationally.

On “Australia day” - a day that centres and celebrates the arrival of white people to an already-occupied land – QAI believes we should recognise the remarkable survival of some of the world’s oldest living cultures. Despite forced removal, genocide, cultural displacement and over-incarceration, this culture and connection to sea, sky and land endures.

Rather than celebrating a day that causes so much hurt to our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander brothers and sisters, we ask you to use this day as an opportunity to reflect upon the remarkable achievements and incredible resilience of Australia’s First Nations people.

To assist with this, we have provided a list of suggestions to learn from, and engage with, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, history, and truth-telling.



Attribution:

- “Australians, 2006 to 2031”; ABS cat. no. 3238.0. Canberra: ABS. [Series B projections].
- Pearson, L. (2016) “Why we need to change the date of Australia Day”. IndigenousX [online]
- Kroff, J. (2020) “Australia Day – Invasion Day”. Creative Spirits [online]
- Queensland Government Statistician’s Office, Prisoners in Queensland, 2018