

Fremantle moves Australia Day events to 28 January

Mayor of the West Australian council says it is time to acknowledge that 26 January is not a day of celebration for everyone



Australia Day celebrations. Fremantle council has moved its formal events to 28 January. Photograph: Jonny Weeks for the Guardian

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Fremantle council has decided to move its traditional Australia Day events to 28 January because of cultural sensitivities.

“We thought it was time to acknowledge it wasn’t a day of celebration for everybody and it was an opportunity for us to come up with a different format on a different day that could be truly inclusive,” mayor Brad Pettitt told the West Australian on Friday.

Pettitt said the council said it had heard “loud and clear” from local Aboriginal elders that it wasn’t a day to celebrate.

But former West Australian of the Year Robert Isaacs told the paper he had not heard of any complaints from his Aboriginal community.

“It’s not in line with community attitudes,” he said. “I strongly condemn them for this whole thing ... Australia Day is Australia Day.”

In August the council voted to cancel its traditional fireworks display on 26 January.

The council will hold citizenship ceremonies at the One Day in Fremantle event, two days after the rest of the country.

Pettitt said the council had no wish to interfere with other celebrations on 26 January

“We were never trying to say to people they couldn’t do anything or shouldn’t do anything on Australia Day,” he said.

“That’s for other people to judge. We’re simply offering what I think is a really good alternative.”