

Warren Mundine endorses Nigel Scullion's take on Australia Day



Former Labor Party president Warren Mundine.

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- Greg Brown & Rachel Baxendale

Former Labor Party president Warren Mundine has endorsed Indigenous Affairs Minister Nigel Scullion's message that Aboriginal communities never raise the issue of when Australia Day should be held, saying it was talked about only in "places like Sydney and Melbourne".

Mr Mundine, who believes the date of Australia Day should be changed, has regularly met with indigenous communities over the past two years and said no one had raised the date of Australia Day with him.

The date became a talking point this week after Greens leader Richard Di Natale — who lives in the inner-city suburb of North Melbourne — declared a campaign to change the date would be a priority for the party this year.

"I'm on record saying we should change the date but it is a real non-issue in these communities," Mr Mundine told *The Weekend Australian*. "They are looking at jobs and getting education and health — they are the conversations I have (in the bush)."

In response to a push by indigenous Labor MP Linda Burney to have a separate public holiday to recognise indigenous culture and history, Mr Mundine said those recognitions should happen on Australia Day.

“Australia Day is about bringing us all together,” he said. “We’ve got to be honest about our history, have that conversation and we also have to talk about now and the future. We’ve created a great nation, 80 per cent of Australia is currently under a native title claim or a land rights claim.”

Senator Scullion yesterday said the issue of changing the date of Australia Day was rarely raised with him by indigenous people.

“I’ve just spent the last week in indigenous communities around Australia. It never comes up as an issue,” he told ABC radio. “What people are telling me is that they want to make sure they get a good education, and what about more opportunities for access to the health system.”

Senator Scullion said changing the date of Australia Day would be too divisive. “If you want to divide the nation, this is how you go down that line.

“I share my Australia Day with my mates. Obviously as a Territorian, there are many Aboriginal people particularly who share it, and I have to say we share it in much the same way,” he said.

“(Changing the date) is a very low priority on my agenda.”