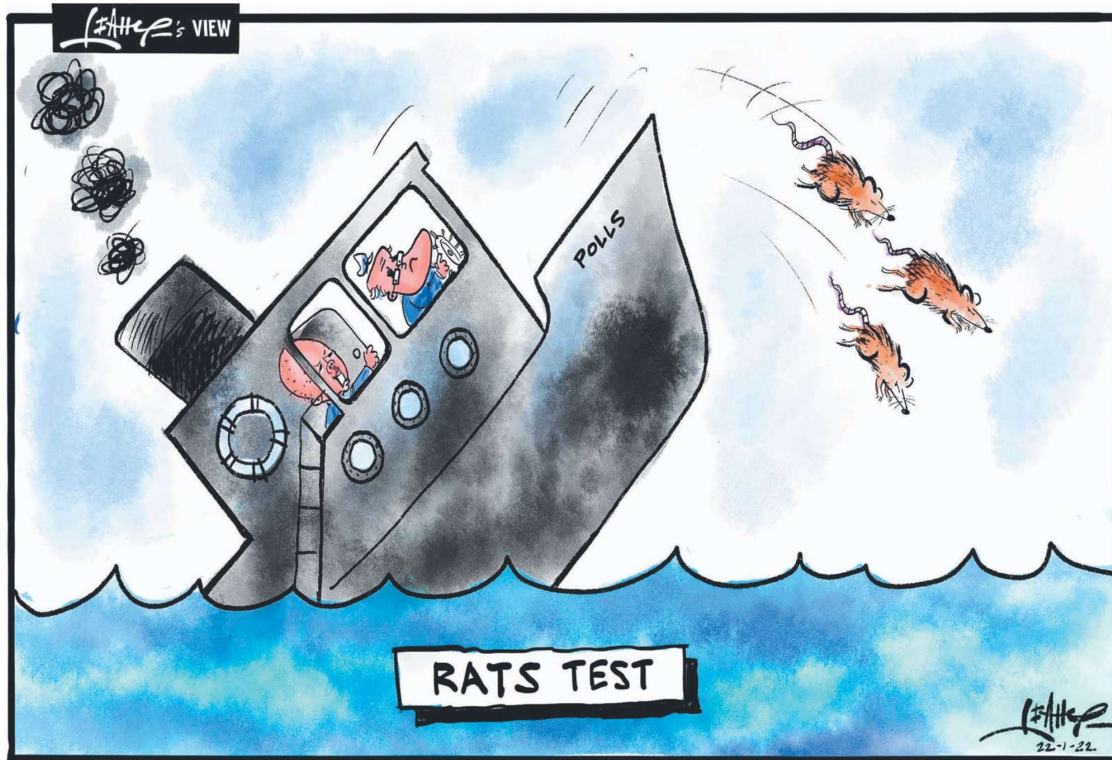


SEAN LEAHY

Mark Knight is on leave. Hand-signed Knight cartoons are available for purchase from knightcartoons.com.au



Switching focus is the way to national unity

TO some Australians, January 26, Australia Day, is a day of pride, nationhood and achievement.

However, to First Nations peoples, January 26 is a day of mourning, trauma and protest. Unfortunately, our national day is underpinned by this stark division.

Each Australia Day is an opportunity for us, as individuals and as a society, to be informed, sensitive and empathetic.

Working towards becoming better allies and standing in solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is an essential step in Australians uniting as a nation.

To my disbelief, only 38 per cent of us can correctly identify the historical event that happened on January 26, based on a poll by the Australia Institute. This highlights the need for greater awareness about Australia Day history and its consequences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The date of Australia Day has caused much controversy throughout the years. The Change the Date movement has consisted of a series of initiatives by non-Indigenous Australians to acknowledge the faults in our colonial history.

The fact is that in Australia we have normalised a history of invasion and, sadly, we are the only Commonwealth country to not have signed a treaty with its Indigenous peoples.

January 26 is an arbitrary date to most of us – we celebrate Australia



PETER MOUSAFERIADIS

Day on it simply because we've always done it that way.

To Indigenous Australians, however, it is a stark, annual reminder of the beginning of the end for many of the First Nations.

Protests on Australia Day raise awareness of the impact of a colonial mindset and are consistent reminders that we are still on our reconciliation journey, with complex questions yet to be addressed.

The problem is not with the concept of Australia Day – for there is much to celebrate about Australia, and being Australian. The problem is the date itself.

A change of date will be largely insignificant to most Australians, but offers a great deal of relief to those we've harmed. It is a matter not only of morals, but also of logic. Change the date, it's that easy.

Meanwhile, Australia Day should be about celebrating all things Australian, and what makes Australia Day is its people. So why not call it "Australians' Day", a day for all Australians?

With a deeper appreciation of Indigenous cultures, we may develop empathy and realise the immense suffering that Aboriginal

and Torres Strait Islander peoples experienced when they were stripped of their sacred land under colonial rule.

On Australia Day, it is important that we profoundly reflect and critically think about the history and meaning behind January 26 and consider the traumatic connotations of this day for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

This can facilitate meaningful dialogue that will not only heal wounds but also assist in the reconciliation process.

Reconciliation Australia, in a 2017 report, said: "Our national day cannot be cohesive and a matter of pride for all Australians if it reminds Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of invasion, dispossession and loss of culture."



As someone who produced and directed nine Australia Day concerts at Federation Square and the Myer Music Bowl, it occurs to me that we should take every opportunity we can to commemorate our shared history – the good and the bad.

The Australia Day concerts I directed explored universal themes around creation stories, musical instruments, the moon, travel, and even the spiritual creator of the Kulin nation, Bunjil the Eaglehawk, is featured.

Casts of 300 to 1000 would come together around these curated themes to build something greater than the sum of its parts, highlighting that we have more in common than our differences.

Australia Day, on a different date, could be a day to remember the past and reflect on the present, and the best way of doing these things is through shared experiences.

I believe that successful outdoor performances and events such as the parade are of utmost importance in bringing communities together in family-friendly, festive settings that promote and build intercultural understanding and appreciation, and celebrate our greatest asset, our cultural diversity.

In the words of Wurundjeri elder and friend Aunty Joy Murphy at my 2008 concert, "Let's keep peace and harmony on this great land."

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FLIP SHELTON

Do less so you can be more

AFTER the previous "unprecedented" two years with lockdowns and restrictions, the temptation might be to pack this year's diary with activities and commitments – to make up for lost time.

In addition, perhaps many of us have already crafted a list of "blue sky" New Year's resolutions.

Indeed, our Western world prizes busyness. Many of us wear it like a badge of honour and for many it equates to our worthiness. We are very good at adding more to our days but not so good at doing less, and to that end we have become human doings as opposed to human beings.

Now I don't want to be a Debbie Downer here, but it seems there will be more unpredictability and uncertainty this year. Some articles say pandemics can last three years, so we might have a way to go yet.

Add to this the "Covid hangover" we will carry into this year – our emotional, physical and financial debt.

So perhaps we can look at ways we can add more human being-ness into our daily lives, which could contribute to a feeling of satisfaction and a sense of achievement at the end of each day, and then ultimately the year – regardless of what unfolds.

Write a daily to-do list, then write a to-don't list. Creating space in our lives can bring about clarity and calm. Some organisational experts recommend having only one thing on a to-do list.

Stare out a window for 20 minutes. The Dutch concept *niksen* means to do nothing and is now being used by psychologists to prevent burnout. How many of us got in trouble at school for staring out the window? Yes, well, it turns out this is an innate response to allow ourselves to just "be". So, we knew all along what to do.

Take off your shoes and plant your feet on the earth for 20 minutes. Our feet have more than 100,000 nerve endings that tell us a great deal about our surroundings and ourselves.

However, most of us wear shoes all day long so we've got little chance of tapping into that vital information because there is a barrier between us and the earth.

So, take off your shoes and walk on sand, soil or stones and just notice what it does to your brain and body, especially your proprioceptors, which are sometimes called the sixth sense.

Then there is the ancient zen saying which has never been more relevant in our modern world than now. "You should sit in meditation for 20 minutes a day. Unless you are too busy – then you should sit for an hour."

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