

NAIDOC WEEK HISTORY

Before the 1920s, Aboriginal rights groups boycotted Australia Day (26 January) in protest against the status and treatment of Indigenous Australians. By the 1920s, they were increasingly aware that the broader Australian public were largely ignorant of the boycotts. If the movement were to make progress, it would need to be active.

On Australia Day in 1938, protesters marched through the streets of Sydney, followed by a congress attended by more than a thousand people. One of the first major civil rights gatherings in the world, it was known as the Day of Mourning.

After the Day of Mourning, there was a growing feeling that it should be a regular event. In 1939 William Cooper — Aboriginal activist, community leader and founder of the Australian Aborigines League — wrote to the National Missionary Council of Australia to seek their assistance in supporting and promoting an annual event.

From 1940 until 1955, the Day of Mourning was held annually on the Sunday before Australia Day and was known as Aborigines Day. In 1955, Aborigines Day was shifted to the first Sunday in July after it was decided the day should become not simply a protest day but also a celebration of Aboriginal culture

. In 1975, it was decided that the event should cover a week, from the first to second Sunday in July.

