



Consultation and Engagement Findings Report

JANUARY 26

PREPARED BY
COMMUNITY
DIRECTORATE



GREATER
SHEPPARTON

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We, the Greater Shepparton City Council, acknowledge the Yorta Yorta Peoples of the land which now comprises Greater Shepparton. We pay respect to their tribal Elders, we celebrate their continuing culture and we acknowledge the memory of their ancestors.

Executive Summary

26 January holds diverse and complex meanings for Australians. It is Australia's national public holiday and a date upon which awards and citizenships have been conferred. However, it is not a day of celebration for all, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.

Reflection on Council's role in 26 January events formally commenced in 2022 with the formation of a community stakeholder group, comprising Australia Day committee members, and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community groups.

In October 2022, Greater Shepparton City Council resolved to advocate to the Australian Government for a change of date for Australia's national holiday, and to continue community engagement to inform a Council decision about Council's role on 26 January in 2024 and beyond.

Council also resolved to conduct community engagement on the idea of having a day of community celebration that is not held on 26 January, that is inclusive, reflects the full history of Australia, and is culturally respectful.

The engagement conducted in 2023 expands on the picture drawn by the Community Stakeholder Group and provided all community members with the opportunity to contribute to this topical debate.

A survey enabling detailed, open ended responses was conducted to gather community views from over 420 individuals, supported by engagement with a number of organisations.

Unsurprisingly, diversity of views about Council's appropriate role in marking Australia Day on 26 January emerged. These views are outlined in this report.

Introduction

Greater Shepparton's demographics

Greater Shepparton has a population of approximately 66,000 which is roughly split between the major urban centres of Shepparton and Mooroopna, and the surrounding rural areas including the smaller townships of Tatura, Murchison, Dookie, Merrigum, Congupna, Toolamba, Undera, Katandra and Tallygaroopna.

Greater Shepparton has a proud Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, one of the largest in regional Victoria. Our community is culturally and linguistically diverse with a large proportion of the population born overseas, relative to other Victorian regional cities.

Council's current role in marking Australia Day

Council's current Australia Day activities, marked on 26 January, are to:

- conduct citizenship ceremonies
- hand out Australia Day awards
- provide financial and in kind support to help communities through the municipality to mark the day.

2022 Community Stakeholder Group

In 2022 Council began formally exploring its role in Australia Day activities by convening a Community Stakeholder Group to explore local community views about Australia Day, and the 26 January date. The major themes arising from the Community Stakeholder Group were:

- Australia Day awards and citizenship ceremonies are considered important, but it is the underlying meaning of these activities that are significant, rather than them being attached to the 26 January date
- 26 January evokes a range of feelings for different people – for some it is a day of community recognition and celebration, for others it is a day of mourning and conflict
- There is an opportunity to work towards a way of celebrating Greater Shepparton that allows the whole community to come together and celebrate in ways that are unique to this community
- 'Don't rush this' – broaden the consultation to include more community stakeholders, including established and recently arrived migrant groups
- Change is important but 'the way you do change is crucial'.

This community engagement followed a period of consultation with a Community Stakeholder Group (CSG) involving members from Australia Day Committees, Aboriginal organisations and non-Aboriginal organisations

2022 Council Resolution

In October 2022, Council resolved that, in relation to their role in January 26 activities for 2023 and beyond, they endorse:

1. *Writing to the Prime Minister, the Minister for Home Affairs, other relevant Australian Government Ministers, Members of Parliament and Senators to:*
 - a. *Change the date for Australia's National Day from January 26.*
 - b. *Remove the Australian Citizenship Ceremonies Code requirement for the local government councils to conduct citizenship ceremonies on January 26.*
2. *The lowering of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flag to half-mast on 26 January at all council-owned facilities to acknowledge this date as a day of mourning for Aboriginal people.*
3. *Financial and in-kind support for:*
 - a. *Greater Shepparton's Australia Day Committees for 2023*
 - b. *'Survival Day Dawn Ceremony' and recognition of this event in Council communications*
4. *A review of the Australia Day grant guidelines to encourage and support grant recipients to reflect on Australia's full history at events held on January 26*
5. *Continued community engagement to inform a Council decision about:*
 - a. *Australia Day in 2024 and beyond*
 - b. *The development of a program proposal for a day of community celebration for 2024, that is not held on 26 January, that is inclusive, reflects the full history of Australia and is culturally respectful.*

2023 Community Survey

Over a 5 week period from May to June 2023, Council conducted community engagement about their role in marking Australia Day on 26 January, and the idea of having a day of community celebration that is not held on 26 January, is inclusive, reflects the full history of Australia and is culturally respectful.

The key purpose of the community engagement was to:

- encourage residents to share their thoughts on Council's role on 26 January
- create a platform for respectful community feedback
- provide Council with feedback relating to the development of a community celebration that is not held on 26 January, is inclusive, reflects the full history of Australia is and culturally respectful.

This findings report provides an analysis of the findings of the 2023 community conversation and will be presented to Council to inform their decision making on Council's role in Australia Day activities on 26 January 2024 and beyond.

*Detailed notes about the methodology and survey are provided in **Appendix 1**.*

What we heard

Sentiment about the date of 26 January

The question was asked ‘How do you feel about the date 26 January?’ Unsurprisingly, significant diversity of opinion emerged from the responses.

Overall, the sentiment for change was split roughly between those for and against changing the date. Respondents under the age of 45 were more likely to be supportive of change, with respondents aged over 55 more likely to be supportive of current arrangements.

A common theme arising from the responses was that it is ‘not a date to celebrate’. It was evident from those advocating for change on Australia Day their views related to the negative associations with the 26 January date to the nation’s colonial origins.

Themes commonly arising from the responses are outlined below.

Theme - ‘Not a date to celebrate’

A dominant theme arising from those advocating for change on Australia Day related to the negative associations with the 26 January date to the nation’s colonial origins.

‘I don’t feel it’s the day to celebrate “everything that’s wonderful about Australia”.

‘It is a day chosen to be Australia Day. It was not a special day in my younger years except as part of my history studies at school. I would prefer we chose another date entirely so that all Australians could join in the celebration’.

‘Now that I know more about the impact of this day on many First Nations peoples, I struggle with the concept of celebrating the day or taking the public holiday. It would be great if celebrations could be moved to a different day.’

‘I love Australia day, but the date needs to change’.

‘It is not a date to celebrate. I feel unsafe on this day and spend the day either out of town or at home’.

‘26 January makes me feel uncomfortable, it’s not a day of celebration at all’.

‘Whilst Council does not control the date – it should continue advocating strongly to have the date changed. I will not attend any Council-run Australia Day events whilst they are held on this day’.

‘Invasion day’.

‘In respect to our Indigenous citizens I believe Council should not hold any citizenship ceremonies etc. on January 26 – Invasion Day to many indigenous individuals’.

‘I feel a deep sadness around this date’.

‘Australia Day – if it is to be celebrated at all, it should NOT be held on the 26 January, the anniversary of the invasion of Australia by the British’.

‘It’s embarrassing that Australia is the only country on the planet whose national day is a celebration of its colonisation’.

‘It’s not inclusive of the Shepparton population as a whole’.

Theme - 'A day to celebrate Australia'

Respondents advocating for no change on Australia Day reflected the need to celebrate all thing Australia and retain certain elements of Australia Day eg citizenship.

'It's Australia Day – has been all my life. It's a day to celebrate all things Australian and be proud of it'.

'I am fiercely determined to keep January 26 as Australia Day as it is the day I and many others who have chosen to come to Australia to become citizens of this great, democratic country ... we look forward to living in a country that supports all its citizens with equality and fairness. History cannot be changed by any of us, but if can be understood by all so that the future for all its people is fair and just, we should embrace January 26 for various reasons, looking forward and thinking back'.

'Shouldn't be changed as it is celebrating the start of our "nation". Please do not change it'.

'Celebration day'.

'I do not celebrate the so called invasion nor do I support those terrible things. I celebrate who we are today'.

'Australia day should be celebrated loud and proud every year and Council should be a part of promoting it'.

'It is a day that we should celebrate the founding of Australia'.

'It is a very significant date and a wonderful way to celebrate our country'.

'Absolutely fine and it shouldn't be changed and should still be celebrated. Cancel culture has gone too far'.

'January 26 is and always should be Australia Day, unless you want to divide Australians, leave it alone'.

'It's Australia Day. It was the day that my grandparents who came out from Scotland were made an Australian citizen. A day that I am proud of and SHOULD NOT be celebrated on any other day'.

'It's fine, leave it alone'.

'While I understand the date has recently become contentious it needs to stay. We need to celebrate or commemorate the history of our country, warts and all'.

Limited specific connection between 26 January date and what community values about the 'Australia Day' public holiday

Consistent with feedback from several participants of the Community Stakeholder Group convened in 2022, many of the things that are valued about Australia Day as it is currently celebrated, are not closely linked to the 26 January date specifically.

'Many will argue its "tradition" but just because we have done something for a while, and when we find out that it is not appropriate' we should acknowledge this and change or stop doing what we're accustomed to doing'.

'I don't really have strong feelings one way or the other. Nice to have a day off'.

'I know there is a lot of debate around this date. Personally I spend the day catching up with friends in the outdoors with a bbq or down the bush'.

'Makes sense to find a day that does not cause ongoing angst and argument'.

'To be honest, the only good thing about it is that it's a public holiday in summer that has less family commitments than Christmas'.

'Having a day that celebrates all the wonderful things that make up this amazing country is immensely important – but it is crucial that the date is changed to a date that unifies instead of divides'.

What do people value about the Australia Day national holiday?

The 2023 survey asked 'What, if anything, do you value about the Australia Day national holiday'? A list of the current Australia Day activities were provided, as well as the opportunity to add additional comments. Respondents could choose as many options as they liked.

The most commonly cited reasons for valuing the Australia Day national holiday are: in the following order – Australia Day activities, citizenship ceremonies, and the public holiday.

What, if anything, do you value about the Australia Day national holiday?

Themes arising from the 84 respondents who expanded on these ideas included valuing the opportunity to get together with fellow community members, to get together with family and friends, to reflect on Australia, or to note they value these activities, but not held on January 26.

Answer choices	Percent	Count
Australia Day Awards	50.71%	215
Citizenship ceremonies	49.53%	210
Public holiday (no school or work commitments)	46.70%	198
Visiting Australia Day ambassadors	13.92%	59
Nothing	20.75%	88
Other	19.81%	84

A day of celebration for Greater Shepparton, not held on January 26

The question was asked 'Do you have any suggestions for a day of community celebration in Greater Shepparton that is not held on 26 January?'

Significant themes arising from multiple respondents included:

- establishing a community-led event unique to Greater Shepparton that is inclusive of all community members
- transfer key elements of Australia day to a new event
- a role for First Nations people and groups
- don't change, stick with the current 26 January arrangements
- no need – there is plenty of existing festivals celebrating Greater Shepparton.

Suggestions by community arising for 'A day of celebration, not held on January 26'

'A big community-led festival, on country, that is hosted by our First Nations people but that makes everyone in the community feel welcomed. A day that provides an opportunity for truth telling through music, dance, art etc but that also celebrates all those that have and continue to make Greater Shepparton great. A community festival that is recognised as best practice that brings people to our region'.

'We already have great ones e.g. St Georges Food Festival and Converge. Don't need to reinvent the wheel, just add citizenship ceremonies, community awards and a barbeque'.

'Happy to leave the public holiday however no need for any sort of community celebration'.

'Council needs to stick with the national celebration and not make up its own thing'.

'No – I do not support that idea at all'.

'There are PLENTY of community celebrations held throughout the year for all demographics and types of people in Shepparton'.

'I am not sure that you could find a date that would suit everyone. We have a number of events that already celebrate the great things about Greater Shepparton'.

'Citizenship ceremonies, activities in the park, Australian music concert'

'A day when we can ALL celebrate the uniqueness of the vibrant community that is Shepparton. There is a history of this place that goes back into the mists of time and forward to a community so interesting, enriched by its diversity. A celebration that recognises this but ensures the story of those who have been here forever remains at the heart of any event(s). A Welcome to Country – in its full expression rather than tacked on to another event – would be a respectful way to start the day. Citizenship ceremonies could be moved to this day. And any local awards.'

'Would love a big community day down at the lake with the many different cultures of Shepparton involved'.

'All of the above could be included on a different date when chosen'.

'I think it is best discussed with wide community representation after the Council resolution is decided'.

'Emphasis on the "community" in celebration, held in a public space, with no cost to join in ... encouragement for young people age 12-25 to be in the space'.

'It would be amazing to have a culturally inclusive day of celebration for all Australians. Starting with acknowledgment of Country, smoking ceremony and possibly indigenous dance and then onto welcoming new citizens and announcing Australia day awards'.

'Using Shepparton festival timing to add a day of community celebration would make it more inclusive'.

'Something that celebrates the river'.

'Celebrate the Indigenous community and culture'.

'Would love to see Greater Shepparton celebrate as a whole with events in each town/district where possible'.

'I would love to see a day where we celebrate what it means to be Australian (inclusive and kind) where we could have citizenship ceremonies etc'.

'I think there is space for celebrating what is good about this country, on another date'.

Conclusion

The findings of the 2023 survey have expanded significantly on the feedback provided in 2022 by the Community Stakeholder Group, however similar themes have emerged.

Unsurprisingly, diversity of views about Council's appropriate role in marking Australia Day on 26 January emerged, with a significant appetite for change among Greater Shepparton residents, particularly among those under the age of 45.

There are also strong views about the merits of Council continuing to mark Australia Day on 26 January by continuing its current role. These views were most apparent among Greater Shepparton's older residents.

For those seeking change, using 26 January to mark Australia Day represents an unacceptable connection between national pride and Australia's colonial origins. The dispossession and disadvantage experienced by Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is commonly seen by them as a poor platform for celebrating Australia.

The findings suggest there is scope to consider retaining some of the specific activities (for example community recognition awards, citizenship ceremonies) that are most valued about Australia Day and to incorporate these into a new or existing community events.

Similarly there are different views about the merits of conducting a day of celebration for greater Shepparton that is inclusive and culturally respectful and whether such a date adds value to the local calendar.

Appendix 1. Engagement methodology

Who we engaged

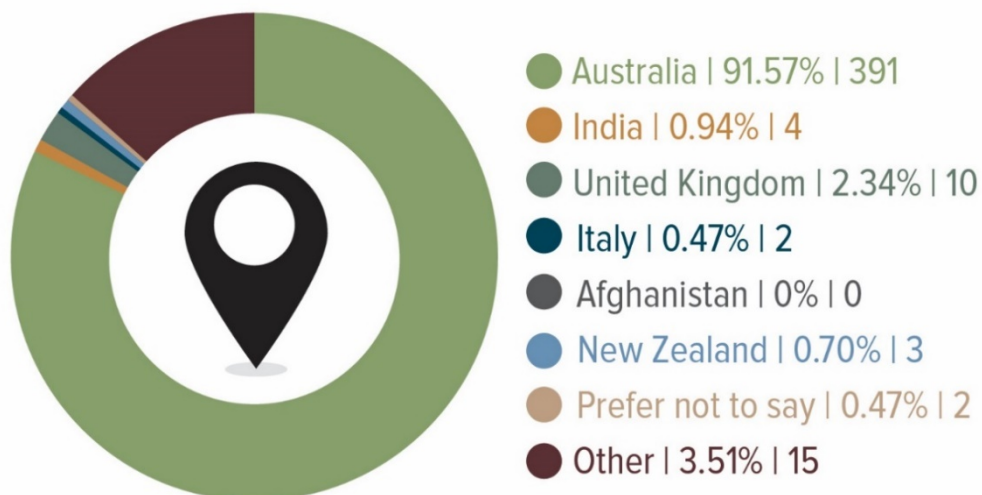
A total of 427 survey responses were received during the consultation period 26 May 2023 to 2 June 2023. Responses were received from 52 Aboriginal and Torres Straight Island People, 345 people from the wider community, and 30 people who did not wish to identify their cultural background. People of all ages contributed.

The consultation campaign was promoted via a number of networks and databases, internally and externally. The networks were from across the organisation including Australia Day Committees, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal controlled agencies, education providers, Neighbourhood and Community Houses and Libraries and other organisations/individuals were provided with the opportunity to provide feedback and/or promote the survey.

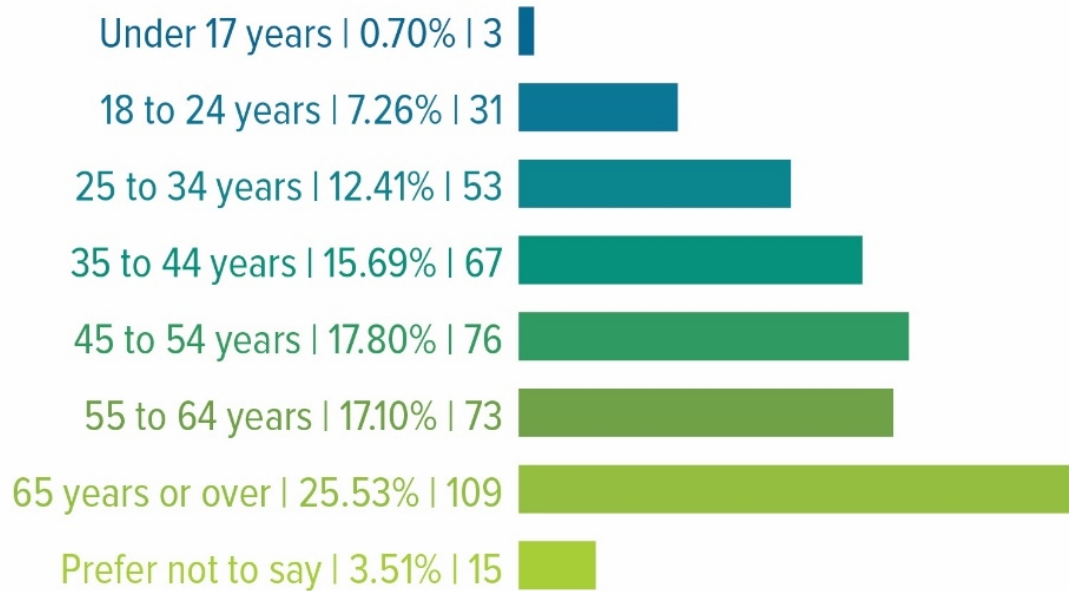
We expect the campaign has potentially reached thousands of individual, groups and organizations. Data from Shaping Greater Shepparton indicate the survey reached 5261 individuals alone.

Demographics

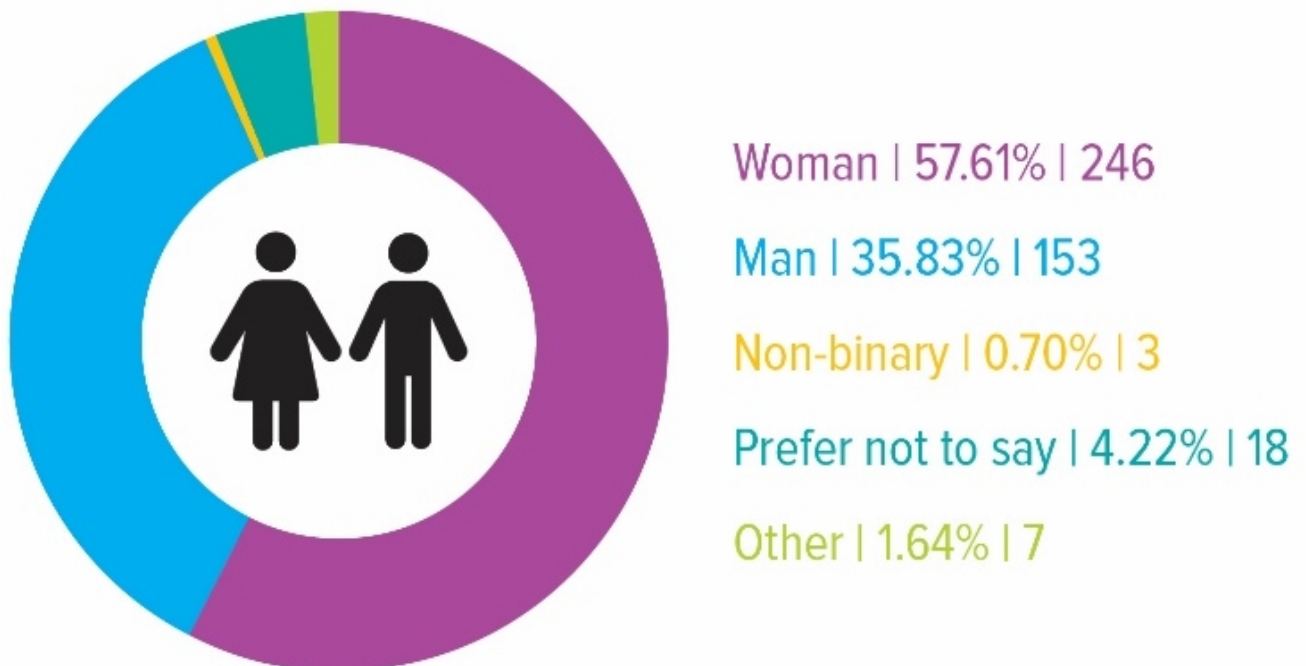
Response were received from 345 broader community members, 52 Aboriginal and Torres Straight Island People and 30 people who did not wish to identify their cultural background. A total of 391 respondents (91.57%) of respondents identified as being born in Australia.



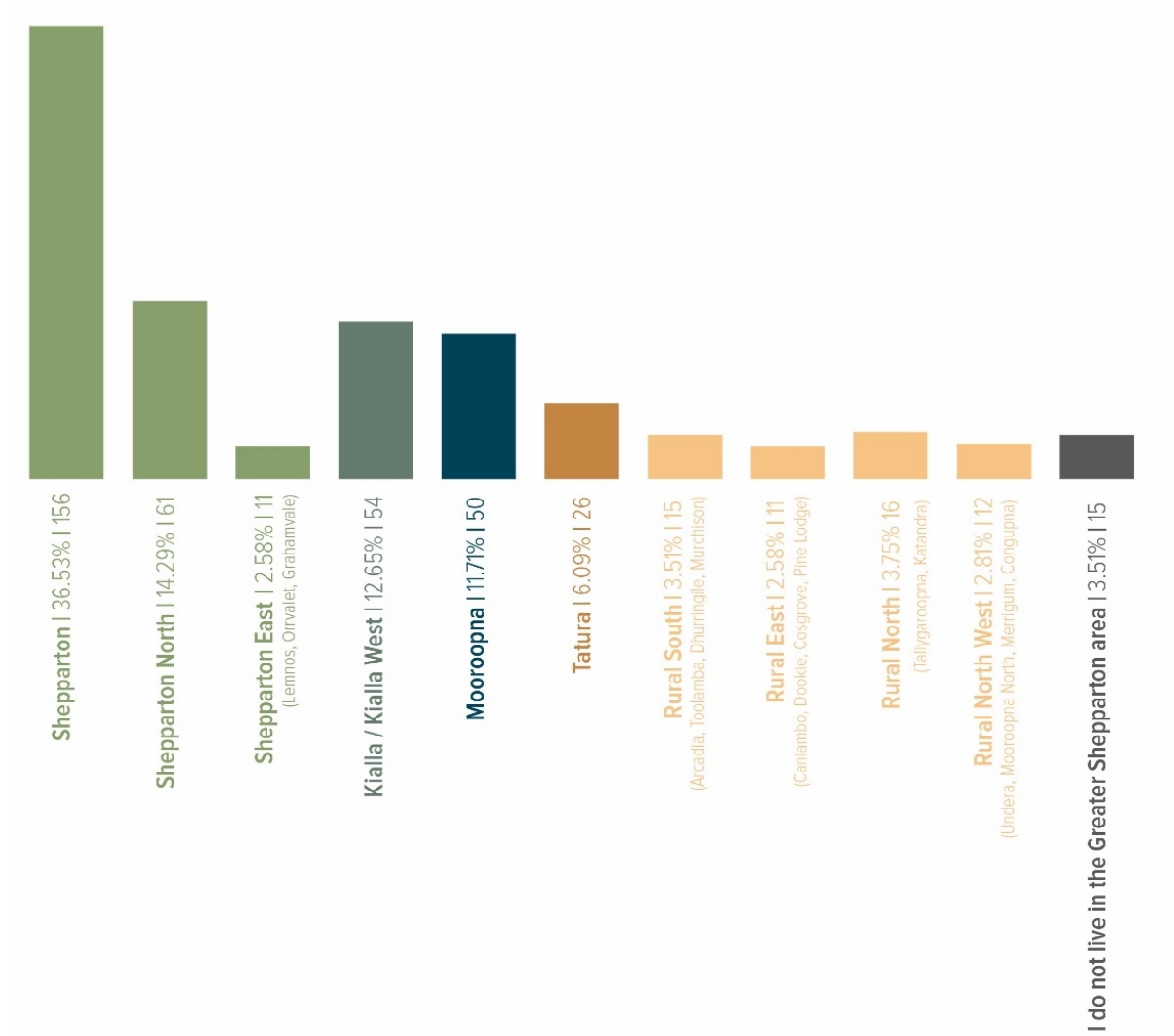
The highest response was received from people aged 65 years or older (25.53% = 109 people).



Women represented the highest number of respondents making up 57.61% (246) of the overall respondents.



Residents of Shepparton (36.3% = 156 people) were the highest respondents.



How we engaged

Engagement method/s

A Community Engagement process was conducted from 26 May 2023 – 2 June 2023, using the following methods:

- an online survey published on Council's community engagement platform *Shaping Greater Shepparton*. The survey was accompanied by a background report
- invitation to community to provide written responses to the survey, or seek a call back from Council Officers via telephone
- social media advertising and promotion
- six (6) print ads in The Shepparton News and The Advisor
- two (2) media releases
- hard copies of the survey and Background Report located in eleven (11) community settings
- direct email distribution advising of the consultation and opportunities to be involved, including online survey, hard copy submissions via hardcopy and/or telephone via the following networks:
 - six (6) Greater Shepparton Australia Day Committees
 - the 26 January Community Stakeholder Group comprising of Australia Day Committees, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal controlled agencies
 - the Greater Shepparton Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group
 - over forty (40) Council databases across the areas of community including education, access and inclusion, multicultural, small towns, volunteers, health, youth, business, environment, arts and culture.
 - sixteen (16) Council Advisory Committees (via the relevant Council Responsible Officer)

The engagement methods were selected to ensure a broad cross section of the community were provided with the opportunity to contribute.



What was asked?

The survey was brief, with several high level questions that invited reflection on how respondents felt about the date 26 January, and the value of Australia Day as Australia's national day more broadly. The survey also sought input into what a day of community celebration for Greater Shepparton could look like.

Three key questions were asked through the survey:

- *How do you feel about the date 26 January?*
- *What, if anything, do you value about the Australia Day national holiday?*
- *Do you have any suggestions for a day of community celebration in Greater Shepparton that is not held on 26 January?*

Responses to these questions have now been themed using qualitative analysis methods and reflected in this report.

Timelines





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