Let's talk about Australia day... No, I'm bloody serious

Brendan Foster

For some people on Australia Day, the level of critical thinking about the "meaning" of January 26 will not rise above whether or not the esky is chock-a-block with ice and beer. Don't get me wrong, as someone who seriously contemplated naming his kid Asahi, I have an acute awareness of the joy a cold frothy can bring to our lives. But as you plunge your hand into the freezing cold water to blindly grab an Emu Export, maybe, just maybe, the synapses in your noggin will trigger something and out of nowhere a conversation about Australia Day will begin.

Nothing revelatory, just a passing flippant comment about the recent divisive and controversial decision by Fremantle Council to move Australia Day back two days. The convo might simply start with Bazza belching out "isn't that Pettitt (Fremantle mayor Brad Pettitt) a dickhead". Frederick might interrupt and proudly proclaim he sides with Freo Council because he thinks it's time to talk about the "the festering, weeping sore that is the issue of racial disharmony with Indigenous people in this country". The pair exchange a few unpleasant personal attacks, before Malcolm bellows 'will you blokes shut up and how do you like your steaks cooked'?

As Fred grabs his burnt chunk of cow off the BBQ he is dumbfounded as Baz relents ever so slightly and concedes in a quiet even voice, he kind of gets where Freddie is coming from. (Yeah, the above is drenched in hyperpole but if we don't believe there is the remote possibility that something magically captivating like Fred and Baz agreeing could actually unfold, then we are stuffed.)

But unbeknown to the small group of friends (like the thousands of other people uncomfortably huddled together to watch the fireworks) a discussion has started about what Australia Day means. That's all. A discussion.

A private political pow-wow that was unlikely to happen at BBQ's, beaches and backyards around Australia if Fremantle council didn't make "the ballsy, courageous and controversial decision not to hold any celebrations on Australia Day".

And that my friends is what it's about. Starting a narrative.

And while it's more than likely our grandchildren will finish the dialogue we reluctantly started, let's not shove it back in the too hard basket of history for another 50 years.

Just in case you've just stumbled out of a forest after getting completely lost on a Pokemon Go hunt, or you just emerged from a biosphere screeching "I hate science", here is a quick refresher. Fremantle Council moved to ban Australia Day fireworks in an attempt at "cultural sensitivity" and a tirade of hatred and bigotry was rained down upon the heads of elected members.

The city then took the extraordinary brave step of moving Australia Day celebrations back two days and yes, you
guessed it, keyboard warriors unleashed a tsunami of more hatred. The federal government then intervened and let's be honest, bitch slapped the council, threatening to ban the city from holding citizenship ceremonies for "politicising" its controversial One Day in Fremantle event two days after Australia Day. 
Ok, up to speed. Almost. Then came the fallout, which continues as I type this and WA Premier Colin Barnett again lampoons the decision by Fremantle.
And only days ago, Noongar elder and ambassador for the Australia Day WA Council, Robert Isaacs, said Fremantle council should be sacked. 
Reclaim Australia and the United Patriots Front are planning to march on the port city on January 26 to protest against Fremantle council's decision as they see it as an "an act of betrayal against Australia".
For those that feel their bigotry and hatred toward Aboriginal people is profoundly justified, then I suggest you grumpily shuffle off because you are missing the point. No one is attempting to steal your freedom and suggest for one nanosecond you call Australia Day, Invasion Day.

This isn't some bitter howl of self-righteous rage from a hobo lefty telling you not to drape an Australian flag around your crispy burnt shoulders and drink yourself into a stupor before slumping into a semi-coma in a $7 Bunnings fold-out chair. No one is demanding anything from you but commonsense. For those still listening or who are willing to listen, let's agree on one thing: the conscious or perhaps unconscious cruelty towards Aboriginal people has to stop. 
Oh, happy Australia Day or Invasion Day. You decide.