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Morning of mourning plan to open Australia Day ceremonies in Port Phillip next year

A solemn “morning of mourning” ceremony recognising Indigenous culture and history could be part of Port Phillip Council’s Australia Day commemorations in January.

Port Phillip Council will investigate how a Council-backed separate ceremony, recognising the impact of the arrival of Europeans on the Boonwurrung and First Nation peoples, could be run in 2020 by Indigenous people.

Mayor Dick Gross, who raised the notice of motion at last night’s Council Meeting, said the proposal would complement Council’s citizenship ceremony, traditionally held later on Australia Day.

Cr Gross hopes the proposal will prove so successful it will be adopted nationally as a respectful way of bringing everyone together to recognise a shared history.

“There is no doubt that elements of Australia Day are controversial. This made me think ‘how do we as a people celebrate our national day in Port Phillip while recognising and commemorating the loss of country experienced by Indigenous people?’”

“The First Nations paid an undeniable price from European ‘settlement’ and we need to acknowledge this,” he said.

“An earlier ceremony, open to everyone, would only enhance unity and pride in our country when we hold our well-loved citizenship ceremony later that day. It’s about delivering an enormously important message of respect and inclusion for all.”

The Boonwurrung Land and Sea Council (BLSC) has committed to work with Council to develop a ‘morning of mourning’ service as a way of finding common ground. The National Australia Day Council has also indicated support for a ceremony focused on Indigenous recognition.

A report outlining details, timing, costs and funding sources for a ceremony in 2020 is being prepared for councillors to consider.