

21075 Australia has changed its national anthem in a bid to reflect 60,000 years of Indigenous history

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The anthem, "Advance Australia Fair," has been tweaked to recognize the country's Indigenous history and communities, Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced on Thursday 31st December, hours before 2021.

The first line, "Australians all let us rejoice, for we are young and free," will now end with "one and free."

"Australia as a modern nation may be relatively young, but our country's story is ancient, as are the stories of the many First Nations peoples that we acknowledge and respect," Morrison wrote.

"Changing 'young and free' to 'one and free' takes nothing away, but I believe it adds much."

The anthem has become controversial in recent years, amid growing conversation about Indigenous representation, systemic inequality, and racial injustice. In particular, many have pushed back against the phrase "for we are young and free" – a nod to when Britain's First Fleet landed in Australia in 1788 – given Australia is home to one of the world's oldest known civilizations.

In 2018, a 9-year-old girl was attacked by prominent politicians because she refused to stand during the anthem out of respect for the Indigenous population.

In 2019, athletes made headlines for refusing to sing the anthem at football matches. And in 2020, national rugby union players sang the anthem in an Indigenous language for the first time at a major sporting event.

But the change was also met with skepticism from some who called it insubstantial, and more symbolic than effecting any real change.

"The anthem one word change isn't good enough!" tweeted Indigenous former world boxing champion Anthony Mundine on Friday, adding that the country needed to "scrap the song & start fresh with bits of black history & white history."

Other critics argued the message is undermined by controversial policies for asylum seekers and refugees detained in Australia's notorious offshore immigration centers, as well as the systemic barriers still facing the Indigenous population.

While the country's Indigenous population makes up 3.3% of its 25 million people, they account for more than a quarter of its 41,000 prisoners. Indigenous Australians are also almost twice as likely to die by suicide, and have a life expectancy that is almost nine years lower than non-Indigenous Australians.

The unemployment rate for Indigenous Australians is more than 4 times the national average.

Australia still doesn't have a treaty between its government and its Indigenous people – unlike other Commonwealth countries such as New Zealand and Canada. The Australian constitution also doesn't explicitly mention the country's Indigenous population.

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