

ARA/NRA SUBMISSION WA PUBLIC HOLIDAY REVIEW

AUGUST 2025

The Australian Retailers Association (ARA) and National Retail Association (NRA), welcome the opportunity to provide feedback to the Western Australian (WA) Government's review of the state's public holiday schedule.

The ARA and NRA, which propose to amalgamate into the Australian Retail Council (ARC), represent a \$430 billion sector, and employs 1.4 million Australians – making retail the largest private sector employer in the country and a significant contributor to the Australian economy. In WA alone, the sector supports around 145,000 jobs across metropolitan and regional communities.

Our membership spans the full spectrum of Australian retail, from family-owned small and independent retailers that make up 95% of our membership, through to our largest national and international retailers that employ thousands of Australians and support both metropolitan and regional communities every day.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ARA and NRA support a balanced, nationally consistent approach to public holidays that recognises WA's unique cultural identity while ensuring retail businesses and their workers can operate with confidence and clarity.

We oppose moving WA Day from its long-standing position in early June, which marks the foundation of the state and remains a cornerstone of WA's cultural identity. The case for change, primarily focused on adverse weather, is not sufficiently compelling to override nearly two centuries of heritage.

At the same time, we acknowledge the Government's interest in improving alignment across jurisdictions. We propose the following targeted alternatives that would maintain WA Day's existing place while delivering meaningful national consistency:

- Move WA's Labour Day by one week to align with other states' Labour Day, Canberra Day, and Adelaide Cup Day.
- Shift WA's King's Birthday to October, to align with Queensland's King's Birthday and ACT, NSW & SA's Labour Day.

We are not supportive of declaring Easter Saturday a public holiday at this time due to the increased wage costs it would impose on retailers. However, we remain open to further consultation, provided any such change is balanced by broader trading hours reform and other policy offsets to support industry viability.

Given the number of public holidays in WA is already in line with other states, we oppose any further additions beyond those addressed in this submission. We also encourage the Government to consider timing changes no earlier than 2028, to avoid compounding the public holiday load during years in which additional days off will be observed due to calendar overlaps, such as ANZAC Day and Boxing Day falling on weekends in 2026 and 2027.

WA DAY HAS NO CASE FOR CHANGE

WA Day, formerly known as Foundation Day, has been celebrated on the first Monday in June since 1832. It commemorates the proclamation of the Swan River Colony as the foundation of the state of Western Australia.

In 2012, Foundation Day was officially renamed WA Day to create a more inclusive public holiday that celebrates all Western Australians, regardless of cultural background or time of arrival. This change was the result of extensive community and stakeholder engagement, with strong public support for a name that better reflects WA's modern identity while still recognising its historical roots.

Importantly, that consultation focused on the name and purpose of the holiday, not its timing. The continued observance of WA Day in early June was maintained, and no compelling case has since been presented to revisit the date. Preserving WA Day in its current form reinforces both historical continuity and WA's distinct identity within the national landscape.

While the ARA and NRA acknowledge the cultural sensitivities associated with this date, we believe there is still significant strong support for WA Day remaining at the same time in June that it has been celebrated for almost two centuries. The rationale for change outlined in the consultation paper, primarily that inclement weather has impacted recent events, does not outweigh the significance of the date. Every other state (except NSW) has a 'foundation-style' public holiday, including several held during the cooler months.

Changing the date would diminish the symbolic value attached to the WA Day name and risk undermining the inclusive purpose that drove its renaming. If the Government is intent on pursuing a change to the date, it would require an equally extensive community and stakeholder consultation process to ensure any new timing reflects the same level of broad public support that underpinned the transition from Foundation Day to WA Day.

ALIGNING WITH OTHER STATES

While opposing any change to WA Day, we believe there are more constructive ways to achieve alignment with other jurisdictions.

1. Shift WA Labour Day by One Week

WA currently observes Labour Day on the first Monday in March, while other states (ACT, SA, VIC, TAS) observe related holidays (Labour Day, Canberra Day, Adelaide Cup Day, Eight Hours Day) on the second Monday in March.

A one-week shift would:

- Improve alignment with the majority of the country;
- Support national coordination for tourism and retail;
- Create a more consistent public holiday schedule across Australia.

2. Move King's Birthday to October

Most states observe the King's Birthday on the second Monday in June, except Queensland, which observes it on the first Monday in October.

If WA also moved the King's Birthday to the first Monday in October:

- It would align WA with Queensland;
- It would coincide with Labour Day in NSW, ACT and SA;
- It would provide a national cluster of holidays, enabling better family travel and public event planning.

This alternative delivers alignment while preserving the early June position of WA Day.

RECOGNITION OF EASTER SATURDAY

We acknowledge the Government's proposal to declare Easter Saturday a public holiday, and note that WA and Tasmania are the only jurisdictions not to do so. While we understand the motivation to achieve national consistency and improve fairness for workers rostered on this day, we remain cautious about the impact such a change would have on retail operations.

In principle, we are open to further consultation on this proposal, particularly if it forms part of a broader package that supports industry sustainability. However, we remain concerned about the cost pressures this would impose on retailers, particularly during the already challenging Easter trading period.

Any additional public holiday must be accompanied by offsetting reforms. This includes progressing long-overdue changes to WA's restrictive trading hours regime, as well as practical implementation measures such as:

- A staged or exempted model for small business;
- Clear guidance on rostering, compliance, and cost offsets;
- Certainty that no additional trading hour restrictions will be imposed on this or other newly designated days.

Ultimately, this cannot be a one-sided policy change. The creation of new public holidays must be balanced with measures that support industry viability and flexibility.

CONCLUSION

We thank the WA Government for the opportunity to provide feedback.

In summary:

- We strongly oppose any change to the timing of WA Day.
- We support a one-week shift to WA Labour Day to align with other states.
- We support moving WA's King's Birthday to October as a better alignment alternative.
- We are open to further consultation on the recognition of Easter Saturday as a public holiday, but do not support its declaration at this time without accompanying reforms that mitigate cost impacts and improve retail operating conditions.

We welcome the opportunity to engage further and will continue consulting with our members in WA.

Any queries in relation to this submission can be directed to our policy team at policy@retail.org.au.