

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**27 JANUARY 2026**

**Australia Day in Cootamundra**

A large crowd of proud Cootamundra residents and visitors turned out at Albert Park on Monday to celebrate Australia Day.

A cool breeze kept everyone comfortable, while local band Coota Connections provided entertainment and the local Lions Club kept the crowd well fed with a delicious breakfast. Children's activities included a jumping castle, face painting, games and Indigenous craft workshops.

Seasoned Master of Ceremonies Paul Braybrooks officiated the formal proceedings, which commenced with a moving Welcome to Country delivered by local Wiradjuri man Peter Beath. Deputy Mayor Councillor Ros Wight presided over the official duties on the day. A citizenship ceremony followed, welcoming four new Australian residents. Sister Kathy Hodge delivered the traditional prayer, and Murray Izzard gave a stirring didgeridoo performance.

Australia Day Ambassador Mr Peter McLean spoke of his experiences and what it means to be an Australian. Cootamundra Country Education Fund President Mr Bill Godman then presented six deserving young people with the 2026 Student Grants.

The morning concluded with the presentation of the Cootamundra Australia Day Awards. This year, two highly deserving recipients, Sister Kathy Hodge and Maureen Simpfendorfer, were jointly awarded Citizen of the Year. Young Citizen of the Year was awarded to Olivia Godber, while Joshua Ismay received the Sportsperson of the Year award.

Sister Kathy's nominations cited her as a true Cootamundra legend—quiet, humble and devoted to a lifetime of caring for others with compassion and grace. She was described as having a gentle presence and respectful nature, never hesitating to respond when needed. A regular visitor to Southern Cross Care and Adina Care, she is a valued member of the Combined Churches Group and many other local organisations, as well as a lifelong devoted Sister of Mercy.

Maureen Simpfendorfer received three nominations, all recognising her dedication and lifetime of service to the Cootamundra Health Service. She has been a member of the NSW Operating Theatre Nurses Association for more than 40 years, was the first nurse in Cootamundra to complete the Line Emergency Care Course and has continually upgraded her qualifications throughout her 62-year career. Known for her kindness, compassion and professionalism, she has been a tireless advocate for patients. Her legacy is one of excellence, setting a standard that will continue to inspire those who follow in her footsteps.

A traditional cream sponge and lamingtons rounded out a morning that saw everyone Reflect, Respect and Celebrate Australia Day in Cootamundra.

**Pictures and caption:**

1 – Young Citizen of the Year Olivia Godber, and Citizens of the Year, Sister Kathy Hodge and Maureen Simpfendorfer cut the cake rounding out a lovely morning in Albert Park for Australia Day.

2 – Deputy Mayor Ros Wight is pictured with Australia Day Citizen of Year Maureen Simpfendorfer and Australia Day ambassador Peter McLean.

3 - Deputy Mayor Ros Wight is pictured with Australia Day Citizen of Year Sister Kathy Hodge and Australia Day ambassador Peter McLean.



**Cootamundra-Gundagai Regional Council**  
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