

SUPPORTING AUSTRALIAN FEDERATION

Federation in Australia did not begin as a popular idea. It took the work of some prominent Australian figures and key events to sway public opinion. Leading up to Federation, the following were identified as essential reasons supporting federation:

TARIFFS AND TRADE

Removing tariffs on trade within Australia would save time and money. Until Federation, people travelling between colonies would have to stop and declare any goods they had, and pay tariffs on them, which was inconvenient and expensive. Support for the change was strongly backed by residents in border towns, such as Corowa and Albury who were most impacted by these tariffs as they often travelled between colonies.

A unified nation would also be more appealing to overseas trading; one set of trade rules rather than six would make trade easier.

IMMIGRATION

Colonies had separate immigration rules, and supporters felt that a central government could make stricter laws to keep non-white, non-European people out of Australia.

DEFENCE

Six small colony defence forces were not as strong as a large, unified force that would be better equipped to protect the nation.

SERVICES

Each colony had their own post and railway systems which was causing problems for nationwide communication, travel and trade. New South Wales had a railway line that was 1.42 m wide, Victoria's was 1.6 m wide, and Queensland's was 1.06 m wide. That meant different tracks and trains were needed for each colony. With a federated nation, a standard, more convenient track size could be agreed upon.

NATIONALISM

Each colony was developing independence from Britain – 'The Mother Country' – and supporters wanted this to be strengthened by the colonies joining together, whilst remaining part of the British Empire.

OPPOSING AUSTRALIAN FEDERATION

Some people in Australia found major issues with federating. Federation did not come about easily, in fact the first vote in 1898 failed. After some changes to the proposed bill, Federation was achieved on January 1, 1901. The following reasons were earlier used to oppose federation:

COST

Establishing a new parliament would be an expensive exercise, and therefore taxes would be increased.

NATIONALISM

Some people were patriotic towards their colony, and had negative feelings towards the others. Over 90 per cent of people in Australia at the time were of British descent, and some felt no need to move away from 'The Mother Country'.

ECONOMICS

Small colonies, like Tasmania and South Australia, were worried that bigger, wealthier colonies would hold the power over decision-making and trade relations. Big, wealthy colonies like New South Wales felt they would be burdened by the financial problems of the smaller colonies.

IMMIGRATION

Opponents to Federation worried that a federal government would relax immigration laws, which would enable non-white, non-European people to immigrate to Australia. Opponents in New South Wales in particular, wanted to remain an independent white colony.

Queensland cane farmers were employing labourers from the Pacific Islands for cheaper rates than they could pay white Australians. They feared federation would end this.

COMPETING ISSUES

At the time, the colonies were dealing with an economic depression and poor social and working conditions. Some felt it was more important to solve these issues first.

DISTANCE

Western Australia initially refused to federate because government officials felt they were too far away from the big, wealthy colonies. They eventually changed their decision when the other colonies agreed to build a railway line to Western Australia to make access much quicker than the long boat journey.