

Major Events (National Multicultural Festival 2026) Declaration 2026

Disallowable instrument DI2026-3

made under the

Major Events Act 2014, section 6 (Major event - declaration)

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Division 2.1 of the *Major Events Act 2014* (the Act) permits the Executive to declare that an event is major event if satisfied—

- (a) that the event is a major event at an international, national, State or Territory level; and
- (b) it is in the public interest to do so; and
- (c) on reasonable grounds it is necessary and appropriate to do so.

The Executive is satisfied the events listed in the instrument meet these criteria.

The National Multicultural Festival (NMF) is an annual, three-day cultural festival held in February. It is one of Australia's most significant celebrations of cultural diversity and attracts hundreds of thousands of attendees each year. In 2026, the NMF will take place from Friday, 6 February to Sunday, 8 February in the city centre.

The NMF is a tourism driver for the ACT. In 2024, the NMF had 417,000 attendees. This was less in 2025 at 329,000 due to the impact of poor weather conditions, however the attendance numbers still constituted approx. 68% of the Territory population. The expected range of attendees for NMF 2026 is between 320,000 to 400,000 across the 3 days of the festival.

The NMF has a positive economic impact to the ACT, with NMF 2024 contributing \$21.2 million into the ACT economy, and \$19.5 million for NMF 2025.

The NMF contributes substantial cultural and social benefit to the ACT and ACT residents, as the flagship national multicultural festival, and a large-scale event encouraging cultural diversity, inclusion and social harmony.

Delivery of the festival requires consultation and engagement with stakeholders including multicultural community leaders and organisations, city businesses, and residents, and cultural venues. Coordination of the event is led by Health and Community Services Directorate (HCSD), with work across government including Justice and Community Safety Directorate, Office for International Engagement, Emergency Services Agency, ACT Policing, City and Environment Directorate, and CMTEDD Communication and Engagement.

Planning and implementation also includes the coordination of approximately 220 volunteers, 260 stallholders, and over 300 performance groups.

For NMF 2025, ACT Policing committed over 200 resources in 3 days to police the event. It is expected that a similar (if not increased) presence is required in 2026.

This declaration applies the provisions of the *Major Events Act 2014* (the Act) to National Multicultural Festival 2026. This notice is a disallowable instrument.

The effect of this declaration is to enliven powers and offences under the Act, Part 3 (Crowd Management) for police officers. Crowd management in Part 3 of the Act includes offences in relation to the possession of prohibited items and interference with the events. Part 3 also provides crowd management powers including the power to search personal property, to conduct scanning searches and frisk searches.

While a major event declaration enlivens extraordinary powers for police officers, these additional crowd control powers will provide for the safe conduct of the event in 2026, considering the significant numbers of attendees.

There has been a material change to the security environment that supports the public interest in a declaration for NMF 2026 compared to previous years. The threat of violent extremism and terrorism is highly dynamic and evolving. The Director-General of Security, Australian Security Intelligence Organisation has stated that politically motivated violence behaviours have become more common in Australia, and we can expect spikes in communal violence.

The attack in Bondi on 14 December 2025 was the deadliest terrorist attack in Australia's history. It came at the end of a year marked by unprecedented antisemitic attacks, vandalism and hatred towards Jewish communities.

These events and the changing security environment also change how the ACT Government should approach its obligations to maintain community protection for crowded places and ensure the safe conduct of events for all participants.

The powers enlivened for a major events declaration and the reduced threshold for the exercise of powers engages and limits rights under the *Human Rights Act 2004* (ACT; HR Act), including the right to privacy (s 12), right to liberty and security of the person (s 18), right to peaceful assembly (s 15) and right to presumption of innocence (s 22(1)).

Section 28 of the HR Act provides that rights may be subject to reasonable limits that can be demonstrably justified in a free and open democratic society.

The purpose of the limitation of human rights under a declaration is to ensure effective controls are in place to manage the threat of politically motivated violence or communal violence during the NMF 2026.

The powers enlivened under a major events declaration have proportionate limitations on the duration and scope of their application to provide for the safe and secure conduct of the event.

The power of detention by police officers is a power of last resort under a major events declaration to protect the community and event. Strict liability offences enacted apply only to conduct that may threaten safety or security at an event.

This declaration supports the right to liberty and security of participants and people attending the event.

This declaration takes the least restrictive means of achieving the objective under the legislation.

1. It limits the period the declaration is in force and human rights are limited according to the times of the festival program.
2. It limits the exercise of powers under the Act to police officers not other authorised persons.
3. It excludes most prohibited items [under s 12 of the Act](#) to minimise the limitation on freedom of movement and right to privacy, liberty and security of the person.

However, for the NMF 2026 these limits may also apply to people using the public thoroughfares to access other locations such as private business or primary places of residence. Public notice will occur through a range of communications channels prior to and during the event.

A major events declaration does not restrict peaceful assembly or gatherings, and the restrictions in the *Major Events Act 2014* do not apply to public protests.