

Submission to call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution

The Uluru Statement from the Heart has been accepted and agreed by the vast majority of First Nations people. It has been welcomed by an ever-increasing number of non-Indigenous people, who feel this is long overdue, responding to the invitation from First Nations people to “walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future”.

In an historic consensus First Nations people asked for this in 2017, however constitutional options were explicitly removed from terms of reference in the Co-Design process. I thank you for re-opening this national conversation after the previous government had rejected it.

Constitutional enshrinement is the only viable option for substantive structural change to improve the lives of First Nation Peoples enabling justice and self-determination. The establishment of a permanent advisory Voice can form the basis of a reliable, ongoing seat at the table of government for our First Nations Peoples. I support a Makarrata Commission of truth-telling and supervised treaty-making with a request for three actions:

1. The Federal government honours its electoral promise to take a model for a Voice to Parliament, with a referendum.
2. The legislation for the Voice is passed after the referendum in the next term of Parliament.
3. The National Voice member model ensures ALL Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island grass root voices are heard.

It is a timely opportunity to join other countries around the world in honouring its First Nations Peoples in both a symbolic and practical way. The next step for this government is to demonstrate leadership and solidarity enabling ALL Australians to support First Nations Voice to Parliament. I believe these steps will enable Australians to engage with a fuller expression of our nationhood and appreciate the gift of sustaining the oldest living culture in the world.

An outcome will be that there is more opportunity for healing through truth-telling and truth-hearing, and therefore an opening for everyone to be and give their best in this state and in this country. It is also an important issue related to the increase in youth crime rates. A properly constituted National Voice is a productivity measure. Improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as for flourishing of all the diverse communities in Australia, will have a flow-on benefit to all Australians.

The time has come.

Barbara Lawler
30 April 2021