

29 April 2021

Dear Co-Design Body

SUBMISSION IN SUPPORT OF A FIRST NATIONS VOICE TO PARLIAMENT PROTECTED BY THE CONSTITUTION

I am a lawyer and nationally accredited mediator NMAS. I hold a Bachelor of Laws (Hons) and a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Sydney. I am a graduate member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

I wish to express my support for the Uluru Statement from the Heart and express my hope that:

1. #The Government honours its election commitment to a referendum once a model for the Voice has been settled to ensure that a First Nations Voice to Parliament is protected by the Constitution;
2. #Enabling legislation for the Voice is passed as soon as practically possible after a referendum has been held; and
3. #The membership model for the National Voice must ensure previously unheard Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the same chance of being selected as established leadership figures.

For too long in Australia, decisions have been made for, and on behalf of, our First Nations people without the people with most at stake being offered a say in the matters that affect them. As a result, not only are our First Nations people “unheard” but those charged with making decisions are robbed of the opportunity to listen to, and understand the perspectives of our First Nations people. If our First Nations people are given a Voice, a chance to be heard on issues that affect them, this will have obvious advantages not only for our First Nations people but it will improve the decision making processes for our parliamentarians who are charged with making laws for the benefit of all Australians. It is vital to our democratic process that a First Nations Voice guarantees political participation and representation rights for our Indigenous Australians, and that the Voice be as inclusive of all First Nation people and experiences as possible.

As a non-indigenous Australian I want to accept the generous invitation of our First Nations people to “walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future”. The

collective wisdom that has accumulated over the 60,000 years Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have lived in this country, and the spiritual connection our First Nations people have with our land is a source of inspiration for all Australians as we confront our modern day challenges, particularly the challenge of climate change. I recognise the extraordinary value that the perspectives of our First Nations people can bring to improving lives in all communities across Australia. As an Australian citizen, I want this valuable perspective to be heard; I want the institution of our Parliament to be granted the opportunity to listen to this perspective, and I am grateful to our First Nations people for offering this opportunity.

In my submission it is important for the Voice to Parliament to be enshrined in the Constitution rather than include it only in legislation. For too long “indigenous affairs” have been a political football, with extreme shifts in policy depending on the government of the day. Over the past two decades there have been too many inquiries and reports on constitutional recognition with too little action. Now that our First Nations people have led us all to this point in time through the Uluru Statement; now that the benefits of a First Nations Voice to Parliament are so clear, it would be a travesty if all the work done to arrive at this point in time in 2021 were undone by a future government. The Australian people should have the opportunity through a referendum to have the First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution rather than the Voice be subjected to possible legislative repeal at the whim of any future government.

Yours sincerely,

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