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Submission in Response to the Indigenous Voice Discussion Paper

I am humbled to make this submission in response to the Indigenous Voice Discussion Paper. I support the 2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart in the strongest terms. The views expressed in this submission are that of my own personal opinions.

I support the key positions outlined by *From the Heart* in their 21 January 2021 submission (#6):

- That a referendum must be held once a model for the Voice has been settled.
- That enabling legislation for the Voice must be passed after a referendum has been held in the next term of Parliament.
- That the membership model for the National Voice must ensure previously unheard First Nations people have the same chance of being selected as established leadership figures.

While the terms of reference for the co-design process excluded the consideration of constitutional enshrinement of the Voice, I must declare that the call for constitutional enshrinement of the Voice in the 2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart is emphatic and a call that I hear clearly. I commend submission #38 of 22 January 2021 prepared by public lawyers and eminent legal experts to the Senior Advisory Group and Co-design Groups on the matter of constitutional enshrinement.

Regarding the membership model of the National Voice, I defer to First Nations people participating in the co-design process. However, I support all efforts to ensure previously unheard First Nations people have material membership in the National Voice. The current proposal makes progress on this front with guaranteed gender balance.

I note that the co-design process has considered youth and disability representation in the form of advisory groups, though further progress could be achieved with more consideration of measures to ensure under-represented First Nations people have equitable access in selection for membership. The communication and access needs of First Nations people with disability, communities such as Deaf First Nations people, must be structured into the

Voice; noting these needs have been given some consideration in the co-design process itself.

The co-design process should consider how governance, resourcing and accountability arrangements will be established for the National Voice, with the aim of guaranteeing adequate and perpetual resourcing to perform its functions.

Should the National Voice be established as a constitutional body that is further supported by enabling legislation, the National Voice may be prescribed as a statutory entity under the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act), likely receive some form of annual or special appropriations and may be subject to annual reporting requirements under the PGPA Act or other accountability processes like Senate Estimates.

The consequences of such governance arrangements should be examined through the perspective of concrete enshrinement of the Voice into the future and ensuring adequate resourcing for the Voice, should the government of the day change over time. The interactions of Local and Regional Voices with the National Voice's governance arrangements should also inform the final governance design. As part of these considerations, the co-design process could examine entities such as the Australian National Audit Office and the Parliamentary Budget Office as models of entities that report directly to the Parliament, looking at the advantages and disadvantages of such arrangements.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart should be remembered as a defining moment, where I and many others accepted the invitation of First Nations people walk with them and create the future where the First Nations Voice is heard clearly and where Makarrata is reality. I wish the greatest of successes to all those involved in the co-design process and look forward to final design and the next step in this journey.

Yours sincerely

Cameron Ong