



INSTITUTE OF  
**SISTERS of MERCY**  
OF AUSTRALIA & PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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The Hon Ken Wyatt AM, MP, and the Senate Advisory Board  
Indigenous Voice Co-Design Process  
Reply Paid 83380  
CANBERRA ACT 2601  
BY EMAIL: [Co-designVoice@niaa.gov.au](mailto:Co-designVoice@niaa.gov.au)

Dear Minister Wyatt and the Senior Advisory Group,

Thank you for the opportunity to make submissions in this very important process towards a constitutionally enshrined Indigenous Voice to Parliament that will enhance the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the democratic life of the Australian State.

I am a member of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and PNG – a Religious order with a membership of approximately seven hundred Sisters and one hundred staff, many of whom have worked among Aboriginal people in every part of Australia, in the areas of health, education and social services.

I have been involved with Indigenous people – specifically the Wiradjuri, the Kamilaroi and the Barkindji of Central and Western NSW since the 1980's, and have also visited the peoples of the Western Desert and the Kimberley region of Western Australia. I have witnessed firsthand the disadvantages suffered by these people as a result of their dispossession and disempowerment over two hundred years, and supported their struggle during the 1980's for Land Rights and other essential services. My involvement has included direct service in education and community, as well as working for structural change.

In the history of the oldest and longest surviving living culture in the world, two hundred and thirty three years is a short time in which to lose one's culture, language and land, and in many cases, one's family. But Australian Indigenous people have demonstrated that they are resilient, they are survivors. It is something of a miracle that so much of their oral tradition and culture has been retained in the face of consistent repression. That remnant has been validated by scientific research and investigation. It is a gift to all Australians that, in spite of everything, the root stock is sound and capable of nourishing the branches that have been grafted on to it from all over the world.

For many years, Australians have sought to articulate the Australian identity. Australia will never be the nation it is capable of becoming until its Indigenous peoples have found respect and acceptance of their rightful place and role in the Australian community. Moreover, this place and role needs to be enshrined not just in legislation, which we have already seen can be altered by successive Governments, but in the body of the Australian Constitution, as sought by the Uluru Statement from the Heart (the Uluru Statement).

While it is clear to me that there are many voices and opinions across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, I believe that the process of Indigenous-led regional dialogues amongst Indigenous selected delegates, that culminated in the Uluru Statement from the Heart, was a robust and comprehensive process that commendably upheld the right of self-determination for Indigenous Peoples, allowing them to reach a consensus on the need for a constitutionally enshrined voice, truth-telling and treaty.

The positive impact of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination and empowerment has already been proven many times in the past year, most notably through the co-designed Closing the Gap Agreement, and the responses of the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations during the

COVID-19 Pandemic that have kept indigenous communities safe. I am disappointed at the lack of discussion of Constitutional enshrinement of the Indigenous Voice in both the Reports of the Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition Relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (the Committee) and the prevention of the Co-Design group from making recommendations on constitutional recognition to enshrine the Indigenous Voice, as per their Terms of Reference.

I therefore urge the Government to select and implement proposed models of an Indigenous Voice in full consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the next stage of the Co-Design Process, and that the primary function of the Voice as a body be recognised as informing the legislative process.

Yours sincerely,

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