

Christopher Lynch
Wurundjeri Country
Brunswick East
Victoria 3057

Dear Co-Design Body

Co-design process: Submission for Christopher Lynch

I have lived and worked in Queensland and Victoria for most of my adult life. In that time I have been fortunate enough to learn from Indigenous Australians on Country, and come to understand in a small way the depth of Indigenous knowledge and how little I know as an ecologist and citizen about the land in which I live. I have also come to more deeply appreciate the profound loss Indigenous Australians have suffered and continue to suffer due to the dispossession of land and the ongoing suffering caused by the ignorance and callous disregard of successive governments.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart is arguably the most important Australian document since Federation. Speaking in one voice, Indigenous Australians (1) make a succinct and powerful argument against the status quo, which has comprehensively failed to deliver justice and prosperity to the original peoples of this land, (2) suggest three practical and achievable means of delivering justice and prosperity, including a Voice to Parliament, and (3) extend an invitation to their dispossessors to listen and work towards a better future for all Australians.

The Voice to Parliament is central to that better future. Firstly, it is important for Indigenous Australians to be consulted directly about matters that affect them. Successive governments have failed to do so, and the results of this failure speak for themselves. As the Statement itself notes, Indigenous Australians are proportionately the most incarcerated people on the planet. Closing the Gap targets continue to be missed. Non-indigenous Australians have comprehensively failed to deliver.

In addition, non-indigenous Australians for the most part do not understand Country, and continue to enact policies such as fire-management regimes that are catastrophically ill-conceived. A Voice to Parliament for Indigenous Australians is not simply about health, education, and justice for some Australians, but about drawing on the expertise of people who understand how to manage the land on which we live in a time of change. We will all benefit on a very practical level from a Voice to Parliament. It will also contribute to a sense of pride in being Australian. Our New Zealand neighbours show us how a deeper respect for Indigenous culture leads to a stronger, healthier, and more relaxed sense of national identity. How can we be proud of being Australian while Indigenous Australians remain second-class citizens?

I believe it's important to enshrine the Voice to Parliament in the Constitution because very recent history shows us that legislation fails to preserve Indigenous consultation over the time span of a single generation, let alone decades and centuries. ATSIC lasted 15 years before it was abolished, and successive bodies such as the Office of Indigenous Policy

Coordination and National Indigenous Council have managed about five years. This is not good enough. However, regardless of policy outcomes the simple fact of the matter is that Indigenous Australians have been here for more than 60,000 years and deserve to be included in the Constitution of Australia. This is a historic opportunity, and Australia as a whole needs to listen to our Indigenous brothers and sisters and together create a better future.

Creating a constitutionally protected Voice to Parliament is the right thing to do. We need to get our act together and get on with it.

Yours sincerely,
Chris Lynch