

A VOICE ENSHRINED IN THE CONSTITUTION

I seek a unified Australia.

I know deep in my heart, mind and soul that this is, without any reservation, the most important work the Australian parliament and government will ever do for ALL Australians.

I am a 58-year-old woman, born to Australian parents in Penrith west of Sydney in 1962. Of Anglo and mixed immigrant descent and raised and schooled as a Catholic, my exposure to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and their culture has been limited.

My childhood was spent living in the suburbs across the road from 'Nan & Pop' and their family. 'Pop' was Aboriginal, lovable and friendly, with the biggest smile and the best cuddles. I was young and knew nothing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, nor his personal story which he never shared with me.

Knowing what I know now, I can only imagine the continuing pain lived by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders dispossessed of their land, culture, language and family. Their fear, that the daily

A VOICE ENSHRINED IN THE CONSTITUTION

oppression which they live with will never change, is palpable, but I am hopeful for positive change.

I believe that healing will not come until all Australians are truly recognised and given a constitutional voice. The time for this change is now and this change must be well reasoned, considered, deliberate, and from the heart (as is their message) to be truly effective.

The peoples who have come together in their struggle to sign the Uluru Statement from the Heart are both 'one' and 'many', with many different needs. A constitutionally enshrined voice to parliament would allow these different needs to be heard. Then and only then, when this voice is acknowledged, may understanding grow sufficiently to bridge the historic and cultural divide in Australia.

In the true spirit of reconciliation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are courageously leading the way. Through the Uluru Statement, they welcome all Australians to face the facts of wrong-doing through truth-telling, to reach peace. This is our way forward to a unified Australia.

A VOICE ENSHRINED IN THE CONSTITUTION

The work the Australian Parliament and Government must do is complex, difficult and absolutely imperative.

What is needed is very clear:

1. Give Australians the opportunity to express our views on a Voice to Parliament by a Referendum in the next parliamentary term, as promised.

Give Australians detailed information to inform our decision before a Referendum is called.

2. Create a protected, lasting, well-funded, separate Voice, to advise Parliament on legislation and policy.

3. Ensure that ALL Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have member representatives in the Voice, so that their diverse needs inform future government policy, programs and structures.

That sounds practical and fair to me.