

Emma Sullivan Smith



Dear Co-Design Body,

### **Submission for Co-design process**

I am the proud daughter and grand-daughter of Wiradjuri men from Central Western NSW. I have close family ties to the Wungunja Cultural Centre and the Trangie Local Aboriginal Land Council. I have a bachelor's degree in science from the University of Canberra, and now work for a large Not-for-Profit medical humanitarian aid charity. Having grown up on the rural fringe of south-west Sydney, I now reside on Gadigal lands, in the eastern suburbs of Sydney with my husband.

*Why do you think the Uluru Statement from the Heart is important?*

The Uluru Statement from the Heart was the culmination of a historic gathering of First Nations peoples. It is a path forward that recognises the First Nations people's connection to these lands and waters of what we now call Australia. It is an out-stretched hand and a gift. It is a way of showing all who live here now, that we are failing the first inhabitants of these lands and waters, but the Uluru Statement from the Heart shows us how we can walk together so that the cultures of these peoples can be embraced and celebrated by all "Australians".

*Why is it important for Indigenous people to have a say in the matters that affect them?*

For non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people living in Australia we take for granted how much free-will and self-determination we individually have. It is a given for any "developed", democratic country today for its peoples to co-exist in relative safety with agreed social norms. But since the British colonisation of these lands, First Nations peoples have not been afforded the same rights and freedoms. Widely recognised as the oldest surviving cultures on earth, who lived under their own laws and customs for more than sixty thousand years, they swiftly lost their lives, their lands, their families, their cultures, and language. And this persecution is still perpetuated today.

Australians have long embraced the benefits of diversity and multiculturalism. We have welcomed people from across this earth. Yet, we have not been so kind or generous to those that have deep familial and cultural connections to these lands. We celebrate Chinese New Year, and we wish our Muslim friends Ramadan Kareem. But broadly Australians in the past, have ignored and rejected that First Nations peoples should have the same degrees of self-determination that the wider population is entitled to. Until now. It is time to change. Now there is a reckoning where Australians from all walks are determined to come together to ensure that First Nations peoples have equitable access to the same rights and opportunities.

*How could a Voice to Parliament improve the lives of your community?*

I believe A Voice to Parliament would have many benefits to the First Nations peoples of Australia. Over the last two hundred years, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have been governed by people foreign to their traditions and cultures. A Voice to Parliament simply and elegantly allows for a genuine representation of First Nations peoples to the federal lawmakers of Australia. More than a

symbolic measure, the Voice to Parliament signals respect of the traditional custodians of these lands and waters. I believe it would empower and enfranchise First Nations peoples.

I am extremely fortunate to work with a bunch of remarkable people, in an organisation with an incredible mandate. I am keenly aware of the benefits of diversity, where differing experiences and viewpoints are shared to produce a stronger voice. Through the work we do, we also bear witness to those that have little or no rights and are targeted for their cultures and traditions. We know, as many educated people do, that marginalised groups have worse health and socio-economic outcomes.

I believe, like many in Australia now, that a Voice to Parliament would signal that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have a rightful place in our community. Positive effects would be felt both individually and within the communities, where teachings, language, land-care and culture can thrive because of the improved self-determination of First Nations peoples.

We recognise the injustices of the past and those ongoing now. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have rich and broad cultures that should be recognised and incorporated into the opportunities that the wider population have. First Nations peoples have the ability to provide strategic direction and solutions to many of the issues that harm them if given a Voice to Parliament. They should have people that look like them, people that sound like them, people they identify with, their mob, their elders, as ones that they can trust and represent for the benefit of indigenous peoples and all those who reside in Australia.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart says it best:

When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.

*Why do you think it's important to enshrine the Voice to Parliament in the Constitution, rather than include it only in legislation?*

It is imperative that a Voice to Parliament be enshrined in the Constitution. Including a Voice to Parliament signifies the ongoing importance of recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders connection to Australia. This sense of permanence should be reflected in the constitution and not something legislated that can change depending upon who is in government at the time. Not only providing constancy in the constitution, a Voice to Parliament being enshrined in the constitution is also representative of a major shift in our cultural identity and should be reflective of that.

Sincerely,

Emma Sullivan Smith

30 April 2021