

Finn O'Keefe



To whom it may concern

Submission to Co-design process

My name is Finn O'Keefe. I have lived all my life in Sydney, growing up in Balmain in the 1970s and 80s, and currently residing in Erskineville. I am a member of the LGBTIQ community and a person with disability. As someone with intersecting identities, at different points in my life I have experienced stigma, harassment, discrimination and disadvantage simply because of who I am. Although my experience is nothing like that of First Nations communities, I feel keenly the injustices faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

I see in my daily work at a community organisation in Redfern, the ongoing impact of systemic racism and intergenerational trauma. Through my work history, I have been fortunate to work closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities in Sydney and Darwin. I have had dear friends, classmates and work colleagues who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, including those who have passed away, give me further insights into the systemic inequities faced by First Nations people in this country.

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

The Uluru Statement is a uniquely important document that succinctly and poetically sets out the injustices and disadvantage that First Nations people continue to face as a result of Australia's colonial history and over 200 years of oppression, exploitation, and abuse at the hands of white Australians. This powerful text is a plea for all Australians to work together to take positive action to enshrine principles in Australia's Constitution that would allow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have their say in matters that affect them. This is only right and fair.

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

Legislation can be amended or abolished according to the whims of government. We need constitutional reform to embed a solid First Nations Voice in our Parliament, so it can be heard clearly for generations to come. This is something that all Australians will benefit from.

*Why do you think a Voice to Parliament is important?*

A First Nations Voice to Parliament is essential. At no time in Australia's history have First Nations people been truly listened to. In 2021, it is well past time to correct this.

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

It is essential for First Nations people to be given the right to self-determination in order to close the gap on the multitude of disadvantage that is experienced by this extremely marginalised and persecuted population: in health, in the criminal justice system, in housing, and in education, just to name a few.

After more than 60 years of concerted advocacy by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people asking to be heard, and over 200 years of colonial oppression, the time for

debate is over, and the time for action is now. We need a First Nations Voice in Australia's Parliament and a referendum that allows all Australians to have their say on this issue.

Yours faithfully,

Finn O'Keefe