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Dear Co-Design Body

Submission for Co-design process

I am 76 years old and was born in Australia of parents from Latvia who came to Australia in 1928 and 1929 respectively, before formal migration programs. My parents had a hard time as newcomers, struggling during the period of the Great Depression as they learned English and found whatever work they could, including itinerant work in mines and factories and enterprises such as eucalyptus extraction and home-based work such as dressmaking and alterations while bringing up a family. They embraced the opportunities afforded and encouraged their children to study and work hard to improve and contribute to Australian society. There were plenty of insults about wogs and foreign accents over this period but there was also kindness and opportunity that rewarded hard work. As the decades passed Australians grew an appreciation, both through experience at home and with greater travel opportunities, of diversity in culture and of the moral courage and strength demonstrated by those who had survived terrible persecutions in other countries. Australia is the richer for having received and welcomed people from many lands, people who give their allegiance wholeheartedly to Australia for having given them a new start in life.

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

To me the Uluru Statement from the Heart is an earnest, beautiful, non-vindictive call from indigenous Australians to be accorded true recognition, respect and opportunities for a better future due to the peoples of a culture that has existed in this land for 60,000 years. All Australians ought to embrace this long heritage and be prepared to be truthful about the violence and disempowerment the first Australians have experienced and continue to experience as part of white settlement. I was utterly shocked at the instant dismissal of the Statement from the Heart by our politicians, their excuses offered in relation to the nature of the Voice sought and the apparent political intention to delay/ 'filibuster' achievement of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution. I am also shocked that for so long we have recognised that people being accepted for Australian citizenship are deserving of rights and opportunities that we continue to deny our first Australians.

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 changed by Governments, and there are plenty of past examples of Aboriginal advisory mechanisms being dumped by Governments arguing that the mechanisms have been ineffective. This is the opportunity to be serious about the future of indigenous peoples. Indigenous people are serious about finding the best Voice and seeking the approval of the Australian people as a whole to incorporate that Voice in the Constitution by supporting a referendum specifically enshrining the Voice.

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

A Voice to Parliament could ensure that all policy proposals, whether directed at all Australians or specifically on behalf of indigenous communities, included prior consultation with Aboriginal people as stakeholders so that the likely impact of proposals

could be outlined in Cabinet Decision papers in much the same way as the views of other stakeholders are currently presented to Cabinet.

Why is it important for Indigenous people to have a say in the matters that affect them?
Indigenous people are Australians, the first Australians and have a right to enjoy the opportunities and benefits afforded to all Australians. The Closing the Gap reports and our failure to implement so many of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody are testimony to the need for a better way to improve the lives of indigenous people. I was a public servant for many years, involved in the introduction of the Aboriginal Secondary Grants Scheme, Abstudy, and various other initiatives to help indigenous people back in the 1970s. Even then Aboriginal people were calling for a self-determination approach but the various advisory roles accorded to them by governments were ineffective and short-lived. In recent years, and in particular through the Covid-19 challenge, we have seen examples of better outcomes being achieved with local involvement in both health, education and justice systems.

What a wonderful opportunity we have now as a nation to really come of age and partner with the first Australians and recognise we are all Australians together. My personal hope is that a First Nations Voice may be enshrined in the Constitution in the near future and that in the event of Australia becoming a Republic after the reign of Queen Elizabeth II we will be able to be truly proud of an Australian identity that recognises our various struggles and embraces us all.

Thank you,
Janet Hadzi-Popovic