

Megan Williams  
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To whom it may concern

Co-design process: Submission for Megan Williams

I am Wiradjuri and have worked for two decades to advocate for the use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's knowledges and needs in program design and evaluation, research, ethics and university curriculum, especially to improve health services for people in prison and post-release. I am Chair of the Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network Human Research Ethics Committee, Research Lead at the University of Sydney's National Centre for Cultural Competence and a member of the Sydney Institute of Criminology. I am miimi sister of Mibbinbah community organisation and contributor to social journalism company Croakey.org including for the #JusticeCOVID, #JustJustice and #CroakeyVoices series.

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

The Uluru Statement is a First Nations Voice, and asks for a First Nations Voice to be protected by the Constitution, which will mean that agreement-making and truth-telling between First Nations people and others in Australia can finally be done on equal terms. With Voice, we can begin the journey of coming together after a struggle – Makarrata.

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

There is a real risk is that constitutional recognition will be separated from the idea of a First Nations Voice. This risks the government putting in place a legislative Voice and pursuing a symbolic form of constitutional recognition that does not accord with the wishes of First Nations people ourselves. First Nations people have the right to self-determine matters that affect our lives according to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Government policies often support this. A Voice to Parliament means these rights can be achieved.

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

It is about respecting what people in Australia envision for us as a country, as well as achieving the rights of Indigenous people. For example In 2020, 94% of the general community agreed it is important that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a say in matters that affect them. And, 86% of the general community think it's important to establish a representative Indigenous body. Further, 81% of the general community think it is important to protect that body within the constitution. So, having a say respects that people in Australia want us to have a say. And, having a say means being able to self-determine and match needs and aspirations to decisions to resources, to then plan for improvements. First Nations people overwhelmingly experience injustices and inequities that are unacceptable in a modern, successful economy like Australia and mean that the voting public's vision of itself is not matched with reality.

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

The Morrison Government needs to hear NOW that constitutional enshrinement of a First Nations Voice has overwhelming support among the Australian voting public. Constitutional enshrinement of a First Nations Voice is the only form of recognition that

garnered the collective endorsement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples themselves. Only through a constitutional referendum will the Voice have the public legitimacy and authority it needs to make sure the government and Parliament will take its advice seriously. Only constitutional enshrinement can give the Voice the necessary stability and certainty in its operation, free from the fear of abolition by one government to the next, while allowing for flexibility in design. If the government doesn't take leadership on this issue, we, the Australian people, will lose the opportunity to achieve the wider objectives of constitutional recognition of First Nations, and lose the opportunity to say that we are a nation committed to developing and sustaining a respectful relationship with First Nations peoples.

The Referendum Council recommended that a referendum be held as soon as practicable to enshrine a Voice to Parliament and commence the journey to Voice, Treaty and Truth. The Referendum Council was confident that the detail on a Voice would be worked out after a referendum supervised by the Australian parliament.

Thank you,  
Megan Williams