



Response to the Indigenous Voice Discussion Paper

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a response to the Indigenous Voice discussion paper. We believe this is critical for advancing reconciliation, achieving which is critical to our maturity as a nation.

About Us

Boroondara Reconciliation Network is one of over 30 local reconciliation groups in Victoria. We cover part of inner eastern Naarm (Melbourne), the City of Boroondara. Under our current name and our previous one of ANTaR Boroondara, we have promoted reconciliation in this local government area for over 20 years and have a relationship with the local Traditional Owners.

Response

Our First Peoples were ignored or driven off their land at the time of white settlement and subsequently. Australia's origin story even pretends that it was an uninhabited land rather than home to a rich culture and economy for over 60,000 years. Until we accept the truth of our founding, we will not be reconciled as a mature nation. We desperately need a new relationship between First Nations and the Australian nation based on justice and self-determination. Truth, Voice and Treaty are essential to achieve this.

Indigenous Voice is significantly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business. Non-Aboriginal decision-makers should be guided by the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We see our role as supporting First People's aspirations as expressed in the Statement from the Heart.

We urge the Australian Government to commit to the full intent of the Statement from the Heart – a First Nations Voice to Parliament enshrined in the Constitution, a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement making between governments and first nations, and a national process of truth telling. This would involve constitutional change, legislative change to establish the Makarrata Commission and to enact the Voice consequent upon amending the Constitution, and the Commission-led process of truth-telling.

A constitutionally entrenched Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament is critical. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people need a mechanism to engage with all levels of

government and have that voice heard. It must not be stifled by the government of the day and must be free to represent First Nations people in communities across the country. It is not a 'third chamber'. It is practical and similar to arrangements in other countries such as Canada. The Report fails in not considering enshrining the Voice in the constitution. It must be so enshrined to protect it from being dis-established. Legislation should be subsequently enacted to determine its composition, powers and procedures, ensuring that they fulfil the intent and meet the spirit of the Statement from the Heart. Prior legislation should enact only the Makarrata Commission.

Recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a preamble is a strong and necessary symbolic gesture. Symbols inspire action towards positive practical impacts.

June Oscar, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, has stated: *The Uluru Statement carves out a path for change and we need that to be embraced by our fellow Australians and our political leaders.* We commend her voice to you.

Truth-telling is at the core of progress towards Reconciliation. We are attempting to promote it in our community, but the lack of knowledge of our real history is still astonishing. It needs a huge effort to redress this, and a partnership in that effort between First Nations peoples, all levels of government, and community groups such as ours. Please help to advance this by establishing the Makarrata Commission and giving it the necessary budget.

There is a need to recognise the diversity within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. A Regional Voice should not detract from the Local Voice but should look at the wider regional issues and reach consensus on how to strengthen cross-jurisdictional cooperation.

Conclusion

In summary, we urge the Australian Government to commit to the three elements of the Statement from the Heart – constitutional recognition, the Makarrata Commission and the national process of truth telling; as all are interdependent and each is critical to our being reconciled with our past and the owners of this land for 60,000 years who have never ceded sovereignty over it.

Leigh Naunton
Secretary, Boroondara Reconciliation Network.