

VOICE TREATY TRUTH

I am a proud 65-year-old Australian, who emigrated to Australia during the 1950's, and whose labour has been devoted to preserving the beauty and riches of this country for future generations. I am deeply grateful for the fortunate life I have lived on this country that is my beloved home. I did not learn about the legal fiction of Terra Nullius until well into my adulthood, but ever since then this profound injustice, at the core of modern Australia, has troubled me.

We Australians pride ourselves on giving people a fair go, always willing to lend a hand to neighbours going through hard times, as we have witnessed so many times when wild fires and drought and floods have wrought havoc in our lives, and especially in 2020. This makes it all the more shameful to see how the people of the first sovereign nations of Australia have not been, and are currently not being, given a fair go.

Despite all our best intentions non-Indigenous Australians have not been able to close the gap and deliver equality for first nations Australians. I see this lack of a fair go not only in the statistics on health, education, employment and wellbeing, which reveal year after year the continuing injustice that colonisation brought to first Nations peoples, but in the massacres and atrocities committed in those early years, histories which have only come to light in recent years, with many more stories yet to surface from our shameful past. The statistics on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child removal, child imprisonment and the continuing deaths in custody, demonstrate our continuing shame as non-Indigenous Australians.

I do not want my grandchildren and great grand-children to have to carry the burden of this shame, when there is a clear and present opportunity for making amends, to heal the past, to set things to rights, and to unify all Australians. I have long believed that self-determination is the key to turning around first Nations disadvantage, something I believe the vast majority of all Australians genuinely want to see happen. This belief was profoundly confirmed for me and many of my family and friends, by the awesome way in which Indigenous Community controlled organisations responded to the Covid 19 pandemic, managing to keep their highly vulnerable communities safe and well. The Uluru Statement from the Heart is a clear message from Aboriginal and Torres Strait islanders on a way to address past wrongs.

A Voice to Parliament is a fair and practical measure to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to exercise this kind of self-determination and control over the policies that impact them. For too long, policies have been made for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, rather than with them.

The challenges facing many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are intergenerational. It is right that there is a Voice that can withstand the changes of short-term electoral cycles and changes in policy. Previous voices have been vulnerable to abolition by governments, but the challenges remain. Constitutional backing for a Voice gives it the certainty and continuity needed to make real, long-term change in communities.

I strongly support the call by first Nations peoples to enshrine a Voice to Parliament in our constitution. I call upon the government to:

- Honour its election commitment to a referendum once a model for the Voice has been settled
- Enable legislation for the Voice to be passed **after** a referendum has been held in the next term of Parliament
- Ensure that the membership model for the National Voice must ensure that previously unheard Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the same chance of being selected as established leadership figures.

A successful referendum to enshrine a Voice can be a historic and unifying moment for our nation.