

Submission of Co-Design of Indigenous Voice to Parliament

Thank you for your hard work in compiling the Indigenous Voice co-design process interim report 2020. I am very keen to have an Indigenous Voice to parliament, comprised of a National Voice, and Local and Regional Voices. The Voice will improve self-determination, which is key to improving indigenous rights, closing the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians in areas of health, life expectancy, rates of incarceration and so on.

I am addressing the options suggested in the co-design models of the voice to parliament.

- The Voice should have at least 18 members (not 16). The Voice requires at least 2 members for each state, territory and the Torres Strait Islands, because even the areas with smaller indigenous populations still have a large responsibility to share. The members would need resources, staffing and indigenous contacts based on the indigenous population in their area.
- Funding would need to include paying the 18 members, administration staff, legal advice, research teams and payment for local and remote area indigenous people to have the capacity to collect data and canvas opinions in their areas.
- Membership terms of 4 years (or longer) are essential to make a proper impact. A term of 4 years allows adequate time for proper consultation. Terms should be staggered so that only half the members are replaced at one time, allowing the accumulated knowledge to be preserved and transferred to new members.
- In order to enhance the Respectful Long-term Partnerships principle, members should not be limited to 2 terms. Politicians in Australia do not currently have a limit on the number of terms they can stay in power, and neither should the members of the Voice.
- Initially, having members with prior experience working in Government and political roles would be useful because they would know how to negotiate with federal politicians and government officials, and this would be key to having the Indigenous Voice heard early on during the process of drafting new laws. They would understand the requirements of writing submissions and reports, tabling documents for review by politicians and they could train newcomers. Finally, they would be able to set up a partnership interface with contacts in local and remote areas to get the information required to properly serve their needs.
- A National Voice is very important because federal laws can help drive public opinion to improve the status of indigenous people.
- I agree that the Voice should not be a structure that supplies services because historically that dual structure was very complicated and ineffective. The Voice should have enough flexibility to change and grow.
- The Voice should not be set up as a business structure. It should run as a government funded organization. This would be a more reliable structure, ensure adequate funding and prevent the Voice from being sidetracked from its core mission by funding and structural concerns.
- A previous imprisonment should not prevent you from becoming a member, (as demonstrated by Nelson Mandela), especially as the incarceration rates for indigenous people in Australia are so high.
- The National Voice will have a right and responsibility on behalf of indigenous Australians to advise Parliament and the Government with regards to any matters that members deem to be significant.

Furthermore, I wish to address the following points beyond the scope of the co-design of Indigenous Voice to Parliament. I support the Uluru Statement From the Heart, which influences the following co-design input.

- The Voice to Parliament must be enshrined in the constitution. This requires that a referendum be held in the next term of parliament. Australians will be voting at the referendum on the final model that comes from this co-design process of the Voice to Parliament. If the referendum succeeds, the model will determine the legislation.
- The Voice to Parliament must consider the voices of remote, rural and city regions.
- The Makarrata process can be fulfilled once both sides have come together to deal with the wrongs from the past and the ongoing injustices, with a National Treaty and Truth Telling.
- I want a National Treaty that pays a high price for what happened and for what is still happening.
- I want a truthful history of Australia to be taught.

I am a non-indigenous Australian citizen, born in Australia. I am now 60 years old, and my de facto husband and I have two Australian children, and we own a house on a suburban block. I trained and worked as a Registered Nurse, Registered Midwife, Accountant/bookkeeper (currently employed part time). I volunteer at Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR), an independent, national non-government, not-for-profit, community-based organisation which advocates for the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia and aims to help overcome disadvantage. Previously I volunteered (part time in accounts) at the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council (MLALC). I am a member of the Women's Reconciliation Network, Redfern.

I suffer grief over the history of terrible suffering that First Nations People have incurred since being invaded, because of the outrageous decision to claim terra nullius instead of at least negotiating a treaty, because of the massacres, enforced removal to missions, working for unpaid wages (slavery) and having a generation of their children stolen. I suffer grief when I continue to see racism, police brutality, high rates of incarceration and deaths in custody, racist reporting in the news and another generation of children being removed.

It was amazingly generous of the First Nations representatives to come together and write the Uluru Statement From the Heart. They kindly presented non-indigenous Australians with an invitation to resolve our conflicts and to finally recognize their Voice in the constitution, make a treaty and have a truthful history. To watch this invitation being swept aside out of hand by Malcolm Turnbull was a truly terrible thing for me to witness. I felt so much shame at that moment.

I am pleading with all Australians to come together to right these wrongs and ease my suffering and more importantly to ease the continued suffering of the First Nations People. I cannot see how that suffering will ever stop, but I want to try to ease it and to stop it getting worse!

I am just a blip in time on my suburban block of land compared to the thousands of years the First Nations People have had a relationship with this land. I was not alive in 1788, but I am now, and I can take responsibly by not standing by and watching the continued racism and atrocities.