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Voice Secretariat
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Dear Voice Secretariat

The Professional Historians Association (Victoria & Tasmania) Inc represents a community of over 200 professional historians throughout Victoria and Tasmania. The PHA (Vic & Tas) strongly supports the Uluru Statement from the Heart, created by the First Nations People of this land.

As historians we are aware of the numerous times since the start of colonisation that First Nations People have called on colonial, state and federal authorities and non-Indigenous Australians to respect their sovereign rights and have been ignored. We believe this needs to stop and we need to listen to First Nations People and pay true heed to their inherent rights as sovereign people of this land.

Uluru delegate and Gunditjmara woman Jill Gallagher has stated '[w]e need to have a hook in Constitution that empowers us.' This means that '[i]f we've got a Voice that's enshrined in the Constitution...if we've got a representative body there empowered by the Constitution to advocate the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in this country – then we can hold the Federal government to their obligations.'¹ Another delegate and Wotjobaluk woman, Janine Coombs described the Uluru convention as occurring in 'a culturally sage space. Everybody, whether they agreed or disagreed, was heard. We all came together as a collective and determined a common goal.'² Palawa man Rod Dillon stated '[w]e need leaders voted in by *our* people, not just be a few here and there. We are weakened because our other representative bodies haven't been protected by the Constitution, by being in the rule book.'³

We support their and other First Nations Peoples' call for a Voice to Parliament consisting of and to represent First Nations People and that it needs to be enshrined in the Constitution.

We urge the federal government to:

- hold a referendum on Constitutional change once a model for the 'Voice to Parliament' has been agreed upon;
- ensure that all First Nations People have the opportunity to participate as the 'Voice to Parliament'; and
- enable legislation based on the outcome of the 'Voice to Parliament' referendum.

We note that the government has already deferred aspects of this process and we expect from now that timelines will be included for all steps and promises made will be adhered to.

¹ Jill Gallagher, as cited in Thomas Mayor, *Finding the Heart of the Nation*, Hardie Grant, Melbourne, 2019, pp. 148, 149.

² Janine Coombs, as cited in Thomas Mayor, *Finding the Heart of the Nation*, Hardie Grant, Melbourne, 2019, p. 156.

³ Original emphasis. Rod Dillon, as cited in Thomas Mayor, *Finding the Heart of the Nation*, Hardie Grant, Melbourne, 2019, p. 167.

The PHA (Vic & Tas) also supports the establishment of a Makarrata Commission to lead a process of making agreements and treaties and oversee the telling of the difficult and necessary truths of our shared history.

We view with hope and optimism the idea that historians and members of the non-Indigenous and Indigenous community will one day, through reforms such as the 'Voice to Parliament', tell stories of a period of reflection and understanding across this country.

It is time to listen to our First Nations People. They have asked us to support the Uluru Statement from the Heart and we do. We implore the government to do the same.

Yours Sincerely

Kimberley Meagher
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