



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

6 May 2021

Submission on the Indigenous Voice Co-Design Process Interim Report

This submission from the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (**the Conference**) on the Indigenous Voice Co-Design Process is jointly prepared by the Bishops Commission for Relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and the Bishops Commission for Social Justice, Mission and Service.

The Conference is a permanent institution of the Catholic Church in Australia and the vehicle used by the Australian Catholic Bishops to address issues of national significance.

There are more than 130,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics in Australia. The largest number of First People Catholics is the more than 15,000 in the Archdiocese of Brisbane. The highest proportion of Indigenous Catholics is in the Diocese of Broome where almost sixty per cent of the Catholic population is made up of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Conference seeks to participate in public debate by making reasoned arguments that can be respectfully considered by all people of goodwill.

The Conference supports the submission of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (**NATSICC**).

The models proposed for the National Voice should include the involvement of the widest variety of First People organisations, including religious faith-based groups like NATSICC. Faith and spirituality are an essential part of the lives of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and so should not be excluded from the National Voice structure.

The structure should reach as many First People as possible and provide a very clear and open pathway for people to contribute their views to local, regional and national consultation processes.

As well as ensuring input from Indigenous people, the National Voice must be able to demonstrate that the message is received and given respectful consideration in decision making bodies like Australia's Parliament. This may require a formal place in the standing orders of both houses of the Parliament where input from the National Voice can be tabled and debated.

Ultimately the Indigenous Voice should be able to show how it has helped Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with very practical measures in their lives, including the preservation of their unique cultural heritage, their economic wellbeing and their physical safety.

Once a National Voice model has been recommended, the Government should move quickly to implement its commitment to have a referendum. Should the referendum question pass, the Government and Australia's Parliament should introduce and pass enabling legislation as soon as possible.

We would be happy to answer questions and can be contacted via Mr Jeremy Stuparich, Public Policy Director at the Conference on 02 6201 9863 or policy@catholic.org.au

Yours faithfully



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