

I write this letter in support of the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

I would like to begin by acknowledging that there is a long history of work advocating for First Nations voices to be heard in this country. The issues that the Uluru Statement from the Heart addresses are issues that have fundamentally affected First Nations people since European people arrived over 200 years ago. It has been a long a difficult struggle to get to this point and many people have worked tirelessly to make these changes happen. I admire and respect the dedication and resilience required to continue seeking to be heard and respected in the face of such adversity.

I am an actor and mother living on Gundagurra Country in NSW. I currently work overseas in television and film and I would like to be proud of this country and our ability to acknowledge and understand our past, committing to constitutional and structural change to make a better future for all Australians. I want my children to be proud of Australia, of how far we have come in acknowledging and addressing past hurts and making constructive changes to create a fairer society for all Australians. A First Nations Voice to Parliament protected by the Constitution is a fundamental step in the right direction.

It is clear from the very thorough consultation process that informed the creation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart, that despite the many and varied viewpoints of individuals and communities, our First Nations people are united in the call for a constitutionally enshrined voice to parliament. Many western liberal democracies have a voice to parliament as a way to incorporate and accommodate indigenous voices and interests in the democratic state. It is time Australia did too.

Relying on the ballot box to reflect the viewpoint of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is not enough. Nor is it enough to have the First Nations people represented in the form of indigenous MPs, as they reflect the values of their party over their people.

It is imperative that Indigenous issues be removed from the realm of party politics and party ideology to allow for planning that isn't at the mercy of political parties changing power. We cannot see a repeat of ATSIC and the disruption caused by the removal of bodies like this at the whim of who is in power at the time. The Voice needs to have the benefit of certainty and durability through constitutional change to truly be effective and therefore it is imperative this voice is enshrined in the constitution.

Article 18 of the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples clearly states that "Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision making in matters that would affect their rights through representatives **chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures** as well as to maintain and develop their own indigenous decision making institutions".

International law, the UN and the General Assembly all agree the most effective way for First Nations people to be heard within contemporary liberal democracies is through a mechanism that is designed and led by them.

This Voice needs to be crafted in such a way that it reflects the diversity of opinions held within indigenous communities and as such it must include previously unheard Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's opinions, not just those of already established leaders. The government must commit to a referendum as soon as a model for the Voice has been agreed on and enabling legislation must be passed in the next term of Parliament following the referendum.

Despite everything they continue to endure, our First Nations people are graciously seeking an agreement. To do that they need their voices to be heard, truth to be told and acknowledged and an agreement to be made and enshrined in the constitution. I implore you to honour them and the future of all Australians by implementing the reform set out in the Uluru Statement from the Heart.