

Submission on Indigenous Voice

We are a group of leaders from diverse fields and industries in Victoria who have come together with the common purpose of exploring our leadership and complicity in the racism, systems and culture that exist in our country. This is a country where despite the promise of a 'fair go', First Nations people experience disproportionate discrimination, fewer opportunities and lower life expectancy. A country that is more easily outraged by corporate scandals than it is by the deaths of Aboriginal men and women that routinely occur under the care of the state. A country that pours money into attempts to address the symptoms of trauma - but is unwilling to invest effort in systemic change. A country that wants to care but approaches First Nations communities as a 'problem to be solved' and implements solutions without the leadership and guidance of First Nations people.

We make this submission because of our shared frustration with the lack of progress by successive governments to meaningfully listen or share power - and our shared commitment to use our privilege, time and effort to be active allies to First Nations.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart encapsulates the shame of our past but also the promise of our future. It is a beacon of the truth-telling required across all levels and sectors of our society, especially among our federal decision makers, to acknowledge our wrongs and make genuine progress towards righting them. It recognises that First Nations people have loved and cared for this land, their children and communities for more than 60,000 years. It calls for all peoples of Australia to recognise the need for change, and to walk together towards a different future.

The Constitution was drafted at the end of the 19th Century, when the only voice for First Nations people was assumed by colonialist protectors. It took until 1967 for Indigenous Australians to even be counted among our population. We cannot wait another 70 years to enshrine a First Nations Voice in the Constitution. We cannot be another generation who doesn't contribute to creating a shared future for our grandchildren and their peers.

First Nation Australians have shown true leadership in developing the Uluru Statement. The Statement is part of a continuing call for change which is unbroken since 1881 when William Barak called for equity, dignity and self determination for his people. The call is on all Australians to listen - and to translate our good intentions into action. Legislative change alone will not rebalance power or enshrine shared leadership of the future of our nation. A First Nations Voice will provide an essential lens to inform decisions that cannot be deliberated, designed or delivered solely by non-Indigenous peoples.

We call on the current federal Government to affirm its support for the Uluru Statement, to invest urgent, intrepid leadership and political energy in the design of a First Nations Voice in the Constitution and to hold a referendum once this has been settled. In the coming term of Government, we will hold our leaders accountable for ensuring the First Nations Voice is enabled in legislation and resourced to meaningfully represent First Nations communities. We support a membership model for the National Voice that ensures previously unheard Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the same chance of being selected as established leadership figures.

We accept the invitation of the Uluru Statement to walk together to a better Australia – to tell the truth and make agreements on equal terms. The time is now.

Signed

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