

Dear Co-Design Body

Co-design process: Submission for Peter Dickinson

This submission is written on behalf of the Barwon Community Legal Service. This service employs Community Lawyers, Social Workers and Ancillary Staff to provide accessible and inclusive services to diverse groups within our community. We actively work to identify and prioritise our most vulnerable who face systemic discrimination or disadvantage, and are more likely to experience barriers to accessing legal help.

The continuing sovereignty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples stretches further back than any other culture on the planet. By use of force and imposition of foreign rule, their rights were ignored, their history erased and they were banished from the land over which they were custodians. Rather than being invited to participate and contribute to the rapid changes of the past two hundred and forty years, they have been shunned, beaten and humiliated. The Uluru Statement from the Heart is a generous invitation to include all Australians in addressing this brutality.

It would be symbolic and crass to have the strength of the Voice to Parliament reduced to a political promise. In the lead up to an election, the right of the Indigenous population could be heightened or diminished depending on the pressure groups, media forces and lobbying of factions. This would be the result of a Voice to Parliament being legislated rather than enshrined in the Constitution. The Voice in Parliament has to be a permanent and relevant aspect of Government that reflects the permanence of Indigenous culture in Australia.

The continuing efforts of groups within our community to close the gap in Health services and standards, in access to legal support at both a civil and criminal level and to engage young Indigenous people in a future that provides them with opportunities and advancement would be amplified by having a Voice to Parliament. Such a structure would allow a Government, when making decisions that could impact on Indigenous people, to hear their opinions and it would demand that those opinions are addressed.

Australia is a country that holds dear its right to self-determination and independence from foreign powers. The Australian people are proud to have a democratic society where we have the right to contribute to discussion and debate on issues that impact on us, individually or as a member of variety of interest groups. It is imperative that Indigenous people possess the same right to contribute to the matters that affect them.

Kind regards,  
Peter Dickinson