

To whom it may concern

My name is Elizabeth Maddox and I am writing on behalf of the Church Council of Pitt Street Uniting Church, of which I am a member. Pitt St Uniting Church is situated on Gadigal land in the heart of the Sydney CBD and is a diverse Christian community which seeks to promote justice and empathy as an expression of our faith. We honour the Indigenous elders and communities who have for 60 000 years been custodians of the land, waters and skies that have become our home, and we have long-term affiliations with various Indigenous groups. I live in Hurlstone Park, in the inner west of Sydney, on Wangal and Gadigal country, and I grew up in Armidale on the lands of the Anēwan people of the Djangadi nation.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart is for us a transformational document. Its formation was a historic moment in the evolution of modern Australia, as Indigenous leaders came together and called as one for an Indigenous voice in Parliament.

An Indigenous Voice to Parliament would ensure that matters of significance to the Indigenous community were kept in the public eye. For instance, public scrutiny would ensure that Indigenous deaths in custody were adequately investigated, and that measures proposed 30 years ago by the Royal Commission into Black Deaths in Custody were implemented. The urgency of steps such as raising the age of criminal responsibility would be brought to the attention of the public. Sacred sites and traditional lands would be acknowledged, and their desecration prevented or at least publicised. The many gaps between the situations of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians would be brought into the spotlight and closed; at present they are only widening.

We believe that it is essential for Indigenous people to play a role in determining their situation, as this is central to empowered citizenship.

The Indigenous Voice to Parliament needs to be enshrined in the Constitution, rather than merely being included in legislation, to ensure that successive governments do not undermine its position or reduce it to a meaningless formality.

The Government needs to honour its election commitment to a referendum once a model for the Voice to Parliament has been settled. Enabling legislation for the Voice must be passed after a referendum has been held in the next term of Parliament; and the membership model for the National Voice must ensure that previously unheard Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the same chance of being selected as established leadership figures. This is what the gathering of 1200 Indigenous elders from all over Australia called for at Uluru in 2017, with one united voice. The cry of this pivotal gathering must be heard and its demands met for Australia to move into the future with any semblance of justice.

Yours sincerely,
Elizabeth Maddox
for Pitt St Uniting Church Council