

Andrew Watts
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To whom it may concern

Submission to Co-design process

I am a non-Indigenous person on a life-long path of learning and valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. I am a Uniting Church minister but write on my own behalf. Over time I have learnt a lot about what my church, and other churches, have done (and not done) throughout our history on these lands. There have been many mistakes and much hurt and trauma caused. I value the path my church is on, including some significant acknowledgements of this past, and I realise we still have a long way to go. My own individual path informs and shapes me. I am gradually learning to do a lot more listening and a lot less talking. I currently live on the south coast of NSW and have the privilege of enjoying the beauty of the Dharawal and Yuin Nations countries thanks to their wise stewardship over millennia. The people from these nations whom I have met have been gracious and welcoming. Previously I have lived on Warwa, Nyikina, Miriwoong and Awngthim countries and been a guest of many nations in the Kimberley as well as Yolngu and Anangu peoples.

Why do you think the Uluru Statement from the Heart is important?

I think the Uluru Statement from the Heart is a key statement in our joint history. It came from an unprecedented process of gathering many Indigenous voices. It speaks of hard truths, with dignity and grace. It is like an invitation to start again from an honest, open and respectful beginning. It names a clear way of doing this - Voice, Treaty, Truth. Past and present trauma will haunt us as individuals and a society until the story is told, until the truth is faced, until we reckon with them.

How could a Voice to Parliament improve the lives of your community?

A Voice to Parliament can give some wisdom and direction for policies and implementation. It can save enormous amounts of money by preventing expenditure on practices that are known not to work and directing it, NOT through intermediaries, straight to organisations who can have positive impacts with people on the ground. At the same time there will be the significant value of Indigenous people having a sense that there is a real and highly visible way in which their voices can be heard.

Why do you think it's important to enshrine the Voice to Parliament in the Constitution, rather than include it only in legislation?

This voice must be enshrined in the Constitution. We are not talking about yet another bandaid patch up job to tweak policies around the edges. What is needed is starting all over again, from the beginning, with respect, dignity, grace and integrity. Starting again means starting with the source document - the Constitution. It was drawn up in the absence of Indigenous people - a sign of the disrespect and fundamental flaw in the whole Commonwealth of Australia project and its predecessors in the colonies. Unless there is a Constitutional change we are wasting our time and energy.

Why is it important for Indigenous people to have a say in the matters that affect them?

Indigenous people must have an unfettered, clear and strong voice about the matters that affect them. It is plainly obvious that decision making by others 'about' them has not worked. On the ground all over Australia there have been and are some incredibly valuable services being run by Indigenous people for Indigenous people. There are many straightforward, common sense solutions that come from their deep knowledge of their own communities and peoples and what works and does not work.

These changes need to be made as soon as possible. People are dying while we delay.

Kind regards,

Andrew Watts