

Francine Finnane
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To whom it may concern

Submission for Co-design process

I am a non-Indigenous woman and the mother of three adult children. I have enjoyed a long career in the screen industry. Our family lineage traces back to the first fleet that colonised Australia, and Irish immigrants who arrived in the mid 19th century. I grew up in Sydney. I have a distinct memory of my primary school social studies book saying the Aborigines were a people who once lived in humpies with the implication they no longer existed. Some years later I was catching the train to high school. Passing through Redfern Station I saw an Indigenous man on a platform and I had a blinding insight that I had been misled by my primary education. I had my first child at the time of the RC into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. I remember the horror of learning about the Stolen Generation, the legacy of intergenerational trauma and explaining this to my children. I remember the very public bitter resistance to Native Title and the ongoing toll of Indigenous people being condemned to prison as a first option, not a last resort. This incremental growth in my historical consciousness of our past and current society continues to trigger my reflection and understanding of what it is to be Australian. In reading about invasion, the frontier wars and its massacres and subsequent racist policies that have devastated Aboriginal families and communities I tenuously grasp the arc of history reverberating today. I struggle to perceive and make meaning of language, culture and enduring Aboriginal law shaping country and how we inhabit our land through the songs of Archie Roach and Gurumul Yunupingu, watching the dances of Bangara, absorbing the beauty of Aboriginal painting, reflecting on the films of Warwick Thornton and of Rachel Perkins, listening to stories of Aboriginal authors, experiencing a shift in consciousness through the revelatory work of Bruce Pascoe and learning about leadership and a way forward through the words of Aboriginal leaders - from Mum Shirl, Charles Perkins and Lowitja Donahue, to the work of Pat and Mick Dodson, Eddie Mabo, Noel Pearson, Professor Marcia Langton, Linda Burney, Stan Grant, Pat Turner, Adam Goodes, Cathy Freeman: voices of hope for us all despite the historical burden of dispossession, grief and disadvantage left by colonisation. It is time for non-Indigenous Australia to be humble, to listen, to cede power and move our relationship with First Nations People to a new footing.

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

Uluru Statement from the Heart was the result of Indigenous people across the country coming together, consulting, negotiating, compromising and proposing a model for constitutional reform to empower their peoples and to take their rightful place in their own country that has never been ceded. It is important because in empowering Indigenous communities to give Voice on the laws and the issues that concern them, our country as a whole may begin to approach solutions for addressing the distressing core issues that plague Indigenous communities and therefore our whole country - the disgrace and trauma of so many deaths in custody, the terrible suicide rates of young Aboriginal people, the disproportionate rates of incarceration, the rates of domestic violence suffered by Aboriginal women, the poor health and education outcomes for so many Aboriginal people. These interconnected issues underline what the Statement says is the 'torment of our powerlessness'. Constitutional reform is the unfinished

business of righting wrongs of colonisation. It is a structural reform that gives Indigenous Australia the voice and authority to effectively influence the matters that concern them.

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

Our Constitution allows for a 'Races Power' that is applied solely in relation to the making of laws about Aboriginal people. That is in itself a racist proposition. It also has 'Territories' power which allows government to make laws directly in the Territories that impact Aboriginal people without consultation of any sort. Such laws range from land rights to cultural heritage. In the Northern Territory this affects the 30 percent of population who are Aboriginal. The Constitution underpins our governance and by including the Voice to Parliament in the Constitution, Aboriginal people will be assured of a Voice to influence the decisions about laws that impact them without the risk that politicisation and the changing whims of the government of the day represent in the case of establishing a Voice through legislation.

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

A Voice to Parliament will improve our whole community by establishing a mechanism by which Indigenous can influence the decisions that directly impact their lives and more broadly promote dignity, truth, justice and healing in the relationship between Indigenous Australians and non-Indigenous Australians.

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

Indigenous people need to have a say on the formulation and application of matters that affect them. Their culture, kinship and community ties, social organisation, knowledge and education and health practices are unique to them and best known and understood by them. Laws developed and imposed on Indigenous people without consultation and consent have demonstrably failed them - closing the gap targets consistently fail, ongoing deaths in custody, unacceptable rates of incarceration of Indigenous children. Empowering Indigenous people with control over their lives will reverse the chronic disadvantage that strikes at the heart of their communities. We need look no further than the role of Indigenous Australia and local health organisations in protecting their communities from Covid to see why it's important to give Indigenous people a say in the matters that affect them.

The adoption of the Uluru Statement of the Heart and the Makarrata Commission promises a profound and positive shift in Australian society through the empowerment of our Indigenous people. We cannot afford to miss this opportunity to remedy the wrongs of the past and present. We cannot ask Indigenous people to wait any longer.

Thank you,
Francine Finnane