

## Submission to Indigenous Voice

1. I am making a submission in response to the proposal for a National Voice to Parliament for First Nations Australians as an individual from a non-Indigenous background. My ancestors include a convict on the First Fleet, convicts on the Second Fleet, and another on the Irish Convict ships, as well as Gold Rush settlers from Ireland and settlers from England, who came here after the Port Philip District was established. My ancestors were part of the early dispossession of First Nations peoples. I recognise also that subsequent generations voted for governments that enacted laws that disempowered and oppressed First Nations peoples.

Reconciliation with our history through truth telling is vital to forging a future that is based on full recognition of the history of colonisation and settlement, and its continuing intergenerational consequences for First Nations Australians.

2. The Uluru Statement from the Heart is a warm and generous invitation to all Australians to join with First Nations Australians in moving forward together to address the realities of our history and allow for genuine reconciliation. Central to this is the genuine empowerment of First Nations communities through a Voice to Parliament. It is vital that this is embedded in the Australian constitution and is not subject to the whim of Parliament through legislation.

I am very disappointed that the Coalition Government has opted to consult with communities for a legislated voice, and not to commit to a referendum for constitutional change. Always, we seem to opt for second best, or worse than that. It is time we rose to the occasion to be the best we can as Australians.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart offers us that opportunity. We should grasp it in all its dimensions: voice, treaty, truth telling. It is well past time that we should take up this invitation for true reconciliation and empowerment of First Nations.

3. It is vital that First Nations have a meaningful say in all decisions that impact on their lives and life chances. The record of government policies and interventions is of failure, of continual disempowerment and control. I have qualifications in international development. Much of what is viewed as best practice in international development is founded on respect, building trust, listening, and empowering the voices of communities, and building capacity. On all measures we have failed. Disrespect for First Nations knowledge, history, culture, language, social and family structures, and autonomy in decision making is entrenched across our shared history, and in current policy settings.

4. First Nations Australians have the right to determine what is done by government in their name. It is fundamental. We know that community-led approaches are most effective in addressing social and economic disadvantage, including health and wellbeing.

First Nations occupy a unique position in our country as the descendants of the First peoples. It is vital this is reflected in the constitution, not with a meaningless set of words in a preamble, but by enshrining a Voice to parliament. Politicians and community leaders need to lead conversations to embrace a constitutional Voice, to create a national truth telling commission, and to move towards the development of a treaty. This is what real reconciliation looks like.

It is important also that all First Nations people have a genuine opportunity to be part of the National Voice. This has been a significant flaw in past consultative bodies established by government.

5. In summary

- it is vital that the Voice as agreed is protected under the Constitution through referendum
- that enabling legislation is passed by Parliament after a referendum
- that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a genuine opportunity to be part of the National Voice to Parliament.

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