

Dear Prime Minister,

Firstly I pay my respects to the First Nations people of this country and especially I acknowledge the Whadjuk Noongar people of W.A.

I write to you as a 90 year old West Australian who has been involved closely with the Noongar community around Perth and nearby regions. For many years I played an advocacy role in Housing, Equal Opportunities Commission, and related matters; for 28 years I have been an active member of the First nations Deaths in Custody Watch Committee. Currently I am a member of the Anglican Aboriginal Ministry Working Group which seeks to provide events where Anglicans and others have opportunities to meet, listen to and talk with Noongar Elders. All this has given me a deep and abiding experience of the daily suffering of families and communities, but also of their strong spirit of their will to survive and move forward.

I therefore urge you, Prime Minister, to accept the Uluru Statement from the Heart that so clearly states the need for a First Nation's Voice TO the Parliament, and:

To bring in Constitutional change that will be inclusive of the First Nations people of this land in which they have lived and thrived for 65,000 years, until Colonisation brought about cruel and destructive changes that have caused generational trauma.

Such moves would ensure that:

1. First Nations people would be given the right to manage their own affairs. The success of such a move has been clearly demonstrated in their success at keeping their communities safe from Covid 19;
2. Their deep knowledge of how to care for country and the natural world. The Ranger programmes' success is proof of this;
3. The increasing number of First Nations people who were working in their own businesses with great success until the impact of Covid 19;
4. Finally, and most importantly, the urgent need in all jurisdictions for First Nations people to be taking major responsibilities in the Justice system at every level; this would be a large step in reducing the systemic racism which causes the abnormal number of incarcerations and deaths of so many Indigenous people and which is a terrible blot on our "lucky country". Merely to provide Liaison Officers carries very little weight and these Officers are constantly treated in a belittling way.
5. In all States there need to be cultural changes in the Police and Corrective services to ensure a much greater duty of care. Increasing rather than cutting funding to the Aboriginal Legal Service nationwide would also be a start.
6. First Nations people would and should be given the right to appoint their own departmental leaders.

Constitutional Change is vital and long overdue. First Nations should have their full rights, recognition and respect as the rightful owners of this land. I believe that the climate for such a change has the support of the majority of Australians and that a referendum would be successful.

At the Rally against Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in Perth on 15:04:21, one person put it this way:

“As the Constitution currently stands, First Nations people are not recognised or regarded as having equal status with all other citizens of Australia and therefore are denied their Human Rights.” [paraphrased] This is a shocking state of affairs which demands change.

I urge you, Prime Minister to listen to the Voice of the First Nations people so clearly expressed in the Uluru Statement that urges a Makaratta so that we may listen to the stories, see our history more clearly and work together for a nation of which we can be proud.

First Nations people know what is best for them and do not need to be ruled from the top down. That time is past and the healing path has begun – let it continue!

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Yours respectfully,

Anne Annear O.A.M.