

The Hon Ken Wyatt AM, MP
Minister for Indigenous Australians,
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

cc: ilc@unsw.edu.au

16 March 2021

Dear Minister,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission in response to the Indigenous Voice co-design interim report to the Australian Government. Social Ventures Australia (SVA) commends the valuable thought and consideration incorporated in the Interim Report.

About SVA

SVA has a vision for Australia where all people and communities thrive and believe that this will be achieved when all Australians are empowered, have a voice in decisions that impact them, have a sense of belonging and experience social inclusion. SVA believes that belonging for all Australians requires, and is enabled through, specific recognition and respect of First Nations knowledge and cultures.

We are a not-for-profit organisation that works with partners to overcome disadvantage in Australia, which requires great education, sustainable jobs, stable housing and appropriate health, disability and community services.

SVA is not a traditional service delivery organisation. We work at the intersection of government, social purpose organisations and the business sector. We seek to influence the way systems operate by providing funding; advising on strategy and evaluation; and making investments in partner organisations to significantly increase their social impact. We advocate for more effective programs and policies, and we convene unlikely coalitions to build support for system wide solutions.

Context for our submission

In making this submission we acknowledge that self-determination, as set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), is the foundational driver of better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

As a non-Indigenous organisation, we aim to share our perspective as a contribution to thinking and debate. This perspective is informed by the recommendations and voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations with whom we have worked. However, we believe that, consistent with the principles of self-determination, the views and perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations must be prioritised throughout this submission process to drive future outcomes.

Throughout our short history, SVA has worked with many First Nations organisations that are creating change in out of home care, education, employment and justice as well as those creating connections to country and culture. We are proud of the work we've done, and we've learnt a great deal working with leaders in organisations who have generously shared their wisdom and experience.

Social Ventures Australia Limited

It is clear to SVA from our own professional experiences that embedding the voices of First Nations peoples in decision making is a precondition to improving health and wellbeing of those peoples. First Nations peoples know what works in their communities, they are the experts in their own lives and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations are the best way to deliver many services to First Nations Peoples

SVA is not a First Nations organisation. We've also made our own missteps and have fallen short as an ally. The questions of self-determination are also not new, nor the frustration felt by many First Nations people, but this is a moment that requires us to act.

As an organisation that recognises the impact of systemic racism in preventing people and communities having the chance to thrive, we add our voice to those calling for Constitutional reform. In 2017, along with many other organisations, SVA declared our support for the Uluru Statement of the Heart and the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution. Following the release of the Interim Voice Report on the co-design process for a First Nations Voice, we reaffirm our earlier support and strongly believe that the Australian Government should act quickly to create such a Voice and protect it within the Australian Constitution.

Whilst we understand that there are some differences of opinions in relation to a National Voice, SVA has heard strongly through our previous work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations that true self-determination requires that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have autonomy, self-governance, voice and participation in all elements of government policy, program and service design. Therefore, enshrining a Voice to Parliament in the Constitution is of the utmost importance.

Recommendations

SVA therefore strongly encourages the Australian Government to:

- Honour its election commitment to a referendum once a model for the Voice has been settled;
- Enable legislation for the Voice to be passed after a referendum has been held in the next term of Parliament; and
- Create a membership model for the National Voice that ensures previously unheard Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the same chance of being selected as established leadership figures. We understand there are complexities in setting up a governance structure that allows this type of membership model, however SVA agrees that a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices must be included to ensure inclusiveness and result in a broad membership base.

Yours sincerely,

Suzie Riddell
Chief Executive Officer