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To Co-Design Body

Co-design process: Submission for [REDACTED]

I'm a law/arts student at Monash University in my final year, with subject interests in international law, human rights and justice, and Medieval/Renaissance history. I also have a passion for social change and community service. I was born and live in Melbourne to immigrant parents, and I am proud of my Asian Australian roots. I've volunteered with various organisations, including local community youth programs, international organisations like Rotary and Rotaract, and fundraised for many non-profits.

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

The Uluru Statement from the Heart is important because it is an important step for our nation to come together so that we can be a better and fairer nation. It is imperative that structural change happens because without it, there will be no justice and no real positive change. The Uluru Statement is the only representative document of the authoritative will of the Indigenous community and we must listen to that and act upon it. It has taken many years and many voices together to reach this point. I, therefore, accept the invitation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart and support a First Nations Voice to Parliament enshrined in the Australian Constitution.

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

A Voice to Parliament improves the lives of every Australian, whether it is an Indigenous community or not. We are not free until all people are free. If we do not lift up the voices of Indigenous people and enable them to politically and socially have a say in the matters that affect them, then we cannot improve the lives of Indigenous people. The Voice to Parliament must be able to engage and intersect with existing bodies and organisations when developing advice to the Parliament and Australian Government is considered crucial, as well as to engage in both directions with Local and Regional Voices. The Voice to Parliament would enable Indigenous people to engage formally with bodies where they cannot already do so and they will be able to advise on laws, policies and programs that affect them at the earliest opportunity at all levels of government. The lived experiences of Indigenous people must be heard and acted upon. Furthermore, we must build solidarity between diaspora communities, like the South East Asian community I am part of, marginalised communities, and Indigenous people, because a nation will only be truly just if we support the equality of each other. Only when everyone's dignity and self-determination is

recognised can we be a nation that truly has hope for the future. Indigenous people must be empowered and allowed to take their rightful place in their own country. When Indigenous people have power over their destiny they will flourish, and so will our nation.

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

There is a real risk is that constitutional recognition will be separated from the idea of a First Nations Voice. This risks the government putting in place a legislative Voice and pursuing a symbolic form of constitutional recognition that does not accord with the wishes of First Nations people themselves. Constitutional enshrinement means that it cannot be changed so easily by successive Parliaments, and a Referendum would also increase the legitimacy of the First Nations Voice politically and socially in Australia, and force the government to recognise public will. Constitutional enshrinement of a Voice will create a new constitutional body that informs the legislative process and thus helps to bring about systemic, structural change, rather than mere fixes to a broken system. It is not a new constitutional "right" that increases the power of judges, or a "third chamber" of Parliament, which is important because it demonstrates that we want to work with the system that already exists.

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

Indigenous people must have a say in the matters that affect them because historically they have not been given that opportunity. According to Reconciliation Australia, 94% of the general community agreed it is important that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a say in matters that affect them. 86% of the general community think it's important to establish a representative Indigenous body. More fundamentally, Indigenous people must be able to have a different power so that they can better represent the diverse opinions of many people as a whole, and be able to negotiate with non Indigenous peoples in a more balanced relationship.

At the 2019 federal election, the Liberal party took a commitment to pursue constitutional recognition. They must fulfil their promise and help create a better future for Australia. We cannot otherwise truthfully say that we are a nation committed to developing and sustaining a respectful relationship with First Nations peoples.

Thank you,

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