

Enquiries regarding this submission can be directed to:

Stephen Byron AM  
Chief Executive Officer

Voice Secretariat  
Reply Paid 83380  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

**Submission to the Indigenous Voice Co-Design Group**

**Prepared by Canberra Airport Group**

**29 April 2021**

*Canberra Airport strongly believes that the Indigenous people of Australia must have a fair go at improving their own future, and that Australia as a nation will be richer and more complete as a result.*

*That is why we are calling for:*

- 1. an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice protected in the Constitution;*
- 2. a referendum to be held BEFORE legislating the Voice; and*
- 3. a model for the Voice that ensures representation of a wide range of Indigenous voices, not just established leadership figures.*

**Who we are.**

Canberra Airport is the international gateway to our national capital region and is located on the custodial lands of the Ngunnawal people.

Visitors arriving at the International terminal of Canberra Airport are greeted by a Welcome to Country in Ngunnawal, the traditional Aboriginal language of the ACT region. The Welcome to Country recorded by Ngunnawal Traditional Owners also features an introduction and translation in English.

As more visitors travel to the ACT region, we want them to appreciate the full history of the land on which they have arrived. Being welcomed to Canberra in Ngunnawal, by Traditional Owners, is an important and memorable first step for visitors arriving in Canberra and sets the foundation for a more enriching experience.

Through our association with The Snow Foundation and their involvement in Indigenous communities, we have been aware of the issues Indigenous communities face. It is reasonable for them to ask that they have a consistent voice on the issues that affect them. Outcomes for Indigenous people are still so much worse than for non-Indigenous people, and it is time to take a different approach to solving them.

## **Recommendation 1: An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice protected in the Constitution.**

### **It's time for recognition**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have lived in Australia for over 60,000 years. Yet they are not recognised in our Constitution and have virtually no say on the matters that affect them.

### **A chance to improve living conditions and outcomes for Indigenous communities**

Despite much effort and money spent, living conditions and outcomes for Indigenous people remain much worse than for non-Indigenous people. Baseline data for the Closing the Gap targets 2020 indicate that Indigenous people have significantly lower life expectancy, are behind in all early development indicators, have lower school completion and employment rates, are over-represented in out-of-home care and prisons / juvenile justice centres, and are twice as likely to die by suicide.

Guaranteeing a Voice for Australia's First Nations people in the Constitution will provide a basis for Indigenous people to take ownership of the challenges they face and the solutions that will improve their lives.

### **Widespread public support**

An Indigenous Voice has widespread support among the Australian public – in 2020, 86% of the general community think it's important to establish a representative Indigenous body, and 81% think it is important to protect that body within the constitution (Reconciliation Australia – 2020 Barometer).

## **Recommendation 2: A referendum to be held BEFORE legislating the Voice.**

It is important to first hold a referendum and enshrine the Voice in the Constitution, rather than legislating it without a referendum.

### **A national conversation**

A referendum will engage the Australian public in a conversation about our past, present and future.

### **Legitimacy and stability**

It provides legitimacy and authority to ensure that the Voice is heard.

It also gives it stability and flexibility, enabling it to speak the truth without fearing for its existence.

## **Recommendation 3: A model for the Voice that ensures representation of a wide range of Indigenous voices, not just established leadership figures.**

The design for the Voice must ensure that previously unheard Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the same chance of being heard as established leadership figures. The work of the Co-Design Group has started this important process.

## **Conclusion**

There is widespread support and momentum for a First Nations Voice protected in the Constitution.

Now is the time to extend the fundamental Australian value of a 'fair go' to First Nations communities, so that all Australians can be proud of our history.