

26 January 2021

It is important and symbolic that on this day, 26 January 2021, I accept the Uluru Statement from the Heart's invitation to "walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future".

I have long believed that we continue to be diminished as a nation until such time as we come to terms with our past. This starts with achieving substantive recognition of the First Nations people that has so far eluded Australia.

I welcome the government's Interim Co-Design Report and understand that term 'co-design' means the current proposals are not complete. As such, I avail myself of the opportunity to provide a submission in support National Voice to parliament as sought by the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

National Voice to parliament must be representative of the diverse populations and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We will continue to disenfranchise the First Nation peoples if only a small number of relatively powerful and influential voices are heard. It is important therefore, that the membership model of National Voice must ensure previously unheard Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the same opportunity of being selected as established leadership figures.

Also, National Voice must:

- speak to the Commonwealth Parliament and Government on policy and legislation.
- act and operate independently from the Parliament and Government.
- not deliver programs or services.
- not be a 'third chamber' of Parliament.

It should be noted that of National Voice has strong and broad community support. This level of acceptance and support will become even greater once it is understood that National Voice was never meant to become, nor will it be a 'third chamber' of Parliament.

National Voice must be enshrined in the Constitution and not be legislated or otherwise implemented before a referendum is held.

Through the Uluru Statement, First Nations people chose a constitutionally protected Voice as both symbolic and substantive recognition. A legislated voice is not able to deliver the transformative change communities so desperately need.

It is important that the enabling legislation for National Voice is passed after a referendum has been held. This referendum should be held at the earliest available opportunity, but at the latest during the next term of Parliament.

This co-design process has focused on the legislative design component.

The second component arising is constitutional enshrinement. There should be a separate structured process to consider the constitutional, legislative and executive options to enact the National Voice following the completion of National Voice Co-Design Final Report.

This process must now begin.

A Voice enshrined in the Constitution is a fair, practical and safe proposal that will unify our nation.

I am pleased to make this submission in response to the Interim Voice Co-Design Report.

Regards

