

Dr Jenny Fisher

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To Co-Design Body

Submission to Co-design process

My name is Dr Jenny Fisher. I am not an Indigenous person. I grew up on the traditional land of the Wiyot and Yurok people of Northern California. Since 2012, I have lived on Dharawal country, and I have been an Australian citizen since 2020. I am an environmental scientist at the University of Wollongong, working to understand and ultimately help reduce the impact that human activities have on our planet.

I am proud to now call Australia home, but I am also ashamed that I have made my home here without permission from the original owners and caretakers of the land on which I live, who have never ceded it. As an environmental scientist, I am in awe of the way the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people cared for country for tens of thousands of years in a wholly sustainable way. As an Australian, I am indebted to them for their role in maintaining this beautiful land. The Uluru Statement from the Heart is so important, because it re-empowers Aboriginal people and invites all of us to walk with them in this journey.

It is fundamentally important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have a say in the matters that affect their lives. They understand their communities, their people, their needs and their strengths in ways that the rest of us cannot. As someone who grew up in the United States, the idea that Indigenous people have a say in the matters that affect them is not new to me. The U.S. Constitution recognizes American Indian and Alaska Native tribes as sovereign governments, with the right to govern themselves. We have an opportunity for Australia to follow this lead but in its own way.

Only by enshrining the First Nations to Parliament in the Constitution can we ensure the Voice is protected now and into the future. Once a model for the Voice has been settled, I expect the Government to honour its election commitment to a referendum, after which enabling legislation must be passed in the next term of Parliament. Such a referendum will allow Australians to take up the invitation from the Uluru Statement from the Heart to walk with First Nations people “in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.”

The proposed First Nations Voice to Parliament would ensure previously unheard Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the same chance of being selected as established leadership figures. It would ensure that Indigenous Australians are represented by leaders who are a part of and truly understand their communities.

Kind regards,
Dr Jenny Fisher