

My submission today comes from the heart. I am a first generation Australian, whose first contact with Aboriginal people was as a child, whenever my parents would take us to La Perouse to buy handmade boomerangs as souvenirs for the extended family in France. Childhood curiosity developed into intense historical interest and political activism. I joined the Aboriginal Land Rights Support Group as a young adult, and since then I have read widely about Indigenous history and culture and have supported a range of Indigenous organisations.

Knowing the tragic history of dispossession in this land and its far-reaching effects to this day, I was deeply moved when I first read the Uluru Statement from the Heart. How can one not be? It is a gift of such generosity to the people of Australia. It shows a way forward from bitterness and division to unity and understanding. It is the only sure foundation for the kind of Australia that most Australians would like to see.

I fully support the “call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution.” For too long, indigenous voices have been silenced and not heard in this country. It is more than time that they have a voice, and this voice needs to be protected by constitutional rights.

In looking at the Indigenous Voice Co-design Interim Report, October 2020, it is clear that great steps have already been made. I wholeheartedly agree with its statement, “An Indigenous Voice is a pragmatic, natural step for our country, as we work towards creating a better shared future for all Australians.” I am singularly impressed with the scope of this report and the depth of knowledge, research and expertise displayed within it and I believe it needs to become a priority for reform in this country.

In seeking to give some helpful feedback to the public consultation now underway, I can do no better than support and echo the submission that has been made by From the Heart.

I fully support the key features for the proposed National Voice, as they appear in the Interim Report, as well as its core function: **Advise on matters of critical importance to the social, spiritual and economic wellbeing, or which has a significant or particular impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of national significance.**

In order to move forward with all the fine work that has been done so far, it is imperative that the Government deliver on its promise to hold a referendum once a model for the National Voice has been decided. This model must be constitutionally enshrined. This is what was asked for in the Uluru Statement from the Heart, and this is what our First Nations people deserve as justice.

Following the referendum, it is further imperative that legislation be passed to enable the Indigenous National Voice.

I note that an important part of the submission from From the Heart deals with the membership of the Voice. Instinctively I feel that this is a matter for

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to agree on. However, I take the point that “there has been insufficient structural opportunity for frontline and community-focused people to be directly involved in national-level deliberations.” So I support their recommendation that “A National Voice representative model must be based on population distribution and Need that gives greater proportional Voice to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in Remote and Regional areas. There must be a structural opportunity for frontline and community-focused people to be directly involved in national-level deliberations.”

I thank you for the opportunity to be a voice in support of a constitutionally enshrined First Nations Voice.