



OUR LADY OF SION

Mildura Vic. 3500.

The Hon. Ken Wyatt AM, MP and the Senior Advisory Group

Indigenous Voice Co-Design Process.

The *Uluru Statement from the Heart* is one of the most profound and moving statements that I have ever read.

At the beginning, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to First Nations peoples from all over the country and its adjacent islands. Thank you for this gift, this roadmap to peace, where First Nations people take a rightful place in their own country.

The establishment of a First Nations Voice to Parliament enshrined in Australia's Constitution is the first step in the roadmap to peace.

I am writing to express my support for the establishment of this First Nations Voice to Parliament enshrined in the Constitution. This needs to be put to the Australian people in the form of a referendum.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have defended their country, led protests and presented petitions to Government from the arrival of the first fleet until this very day.

The *Uluru Statement from the Heart* is an invitation: 'We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.' It is different to a petition to Government.

The *Uluru Statement from the Heart* tells us:

'Proportionally, we are the most incarcerated people on the planet. We are not an innately criminal people. Our children are alienated from their families at unprecedented rates. This cannot be because we have no love for them. And our youth languish in detention in obscene numbers. They should be our hope for the future.'

These dimensions of our crisis tell plainly the structural nature of our problem. This is the torment of our powerlessness.

We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a rightful place in our own country.

We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution.'

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody took place from 1987-1991.

The National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families from May 1995-May 1997.

Both these investigations, significant, among many other inquiries and records, hold the testimonies of dreadful, sorrowful things that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have endured.

I support the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution because this is the only way the Voice can be protected.

A referendum to change the Constitution requires the support of a majority of voters across the nation and a majority of voters in a majority of states.

This would give the First Nations Voice to Parliament a solid form of recognition, a solid foundation from which to speak on all laws and policies that concern First Nations peoples.

This would honour the special place of First Nations peoples, expressed so powerfully in the words of the *Statement from the Heart*:

'Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and adjacent islands, and possessed it under our own laws and customs. This our ancestors did, according to the reckoning of our culture, from the Creation, according to the common law from 'time immemorial', and according to science more than 60,000 years ago.'

Australia's Constitution is our foundational document setting out the legal and political basis of our democracy.

Nothing less than a change in the Constitution by referendum will do justice to what First Nations peoples have put before the Australian people at this time.

The *Uluru Statement from the Heart* speaks of Treaty and Truth in this way:

'Makarrata is the culmination of our agenda: the coming together after a struggle. It captures our aspirations for a truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination.'

We seek a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history.'

The complex legislative processes involved in reaching a Makarrata cannot be negotiated when one party is in a powerless position. There needs to be an equal position between government and First Nations throughout all of the negotiations.

A First Nations Voice enshrined in Australia's Constitution will shift our consciousness and develop our understanding of our democratic form of government.

What I find so deeply moving at this 'moment' in our shared history, is what we as Australians have been offered in the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*.

I would like to imagine a future for our nation as they have done. A future more truthful, and just. A more expansive future, a richer democracy.

I would like to imagine that the Australian people can say with those who participated in this historic meeting at *Uluru*:

'With substantive constitutional change and structural reform, we believe this ancient sovereignty can shine through as a fuller expression of Australia's nationhood.'

Denise Cusack. Sister of Our Lady of Sion.

April 29th 2021.