

Tuesday 23rd March 2021

Dear members and representatives of the Australian Government

Submission in Response to the Interim Report on the Indigenous Voice Co-Design Process

We join with members of Australia's First Nations Peoples and other Australians, from all walks of life, in calling for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution.

We ask that the Government of Australia:

1. Honour its election commitment to a referendum once the model for the Voice is settled.
2. Pass enabling legislation for the Voice after the referendum has been held, in the next term of Parliament.
3. Ensure that the membership model for the Voice is open to all First Nations peoples, from across Australia's mainland and the Torres Strait Islands; and, where necessary, establishes affirmative actions and processes to ensure the equitable opportunity for all to election to leadership.

We write to you as private citizens. We are friends who share a passion for a better and fairer Australia. We are affluent and educated women who have lived fortunate and interesting lives, blessed by careers, family and friends. We have much to be thankful for: we live well, we have shelter, we have the opportunity to pursue our hopes and give life to our dreams. We have benefited from the wealth and opportunities of this beautiful country. We have been blessed by the benefits of good fortune and hard work – and the sheer luck of being born white in this beautiful country.

We acknowledge the expertise and commitment of those involved in the co-design process, and all the committees that preceded it. We affirm the courage of those people who gathered to formulate the Uluru statement. We honour the many others who have advocated, through the decades, for a fairer and more respectful Australia. Our intent in this submission is to advocate for a fairer and more respectful Australia, built on considered and respectful dialogue between all who live in this country. We acknowledge that others carry the responsibility – and the expertise – to articulate the processes by which that dialogue can happen; to formulate the “nuts and bolts” of the how. It is our contention that Australia must take this opportunity to unify our country now.

We believe the tragic and traumatic legacies of our past continue to harm the lives of indigenous people in Australia and inhibit possibilities for our shared future. The wealth and affluence of contemporary Australia is built on the pain and the sorrow of dispossession, of the theft of the lands and the children, and the unacknowledged genocides of the First Nations peoples.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart offers an opportunity to build and strengthen mutual respect and to create bridges between the First Nations people and those who have

benefitted from their experience of dispossession and trauma. The Voice offers an opportunity for dialogue and change; a vehicle through which to build mutual respect, through listening and dialogue. It is an opportunity that we can no longer afford to ignore, if we want to ensure a vibrant, fair and equal Australia in our lifetime, and for the children of the next generations.

We ask you to ask yourselves: how can we, as representatives and servants of all the peoples of this country, ensure a fairer, more equal, Australia, where all have the opportunity to benefit from the wealth and resources of this country, where all are respected for the courage of their convictions and aspirations, rather than condemned by the trauma of the past and the colour of their skin?

We cannot wait. We must act now. The Australian Government must accept and honour the invitation extended through the Uluru Statement from the Heart to build a shared and honest future, together.

We ask you, as our representatives, elected to lead our country, to have the courage to hold the conversations and take action to build a fairer and more respectful Australia: we reiterate the steps nominated by the From the Heart campaign, and ask you, respectfully, to:

1. Honour the Government's election commitment to a referendum once the model for the Voice is settled.
2. Pass enabling legislation for the Voice after the referendum has been held, in the next term of Parliament.
3. Ensure the membership model for the Voice is open to all First Nations peoples, from across Australia's mainland and the Torres Strait Islands; and where necessary, establishes affirmative actions and processes to ensure the equitable opportunity for all to election to leadership.

Sincerely

Ms Suzanne M O'Neill

Ms Tracey Newbury