

Peter Renkin

SHOREHAM Victoria 3916

Dear Co-Design Body

Submission to Co-design process

I am an eighty one year old descendant of convict & settlers from the UK. The first arrival began in Van Diemens Land in 1828 & most arrived the 1840s/50s. I have lived most of my life in Victoria. I am retired from paid work. I have a PhD from The University of Melbourne with degrees in economics, education & social work. I am a member of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Studies. I have taught at Victorian Education Department secondary schools, worked with Victorian & Australian Departments of Aboriginal affairs - including community work with the Aboriginal people of East Gippsland, especially Lake Tyers residents & I have been a Regional Director of the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs. I have lectured in social work at the University of Melbourne concentrating on Indigenous policy & practice.

Why do you think the Uluru Statement from the Heart is important?

Indigenous Australians occupied this continent before European settlement & no First Peoples ceded their sovereignty. The Government of Great Britain claimed possession of the land without any negotiation with Indigenous people. The absence of any negotiated agreement or Treaty has been, & is today, a fundamental flaw in the foundation of the Australian State & society. The Australian Constitution does not recognise the original occupants, nor the special status this gives Indigenous peoples. The Uluru Statement from the Heart constitutes terms devised by Indigenous people upon which the defects in the Constitution can be rectified. These terms were formed after a authentic process of nation wide consultation. The Statement was initiated by Indigenous people as a way to resolve the dilemma which divides our society & nation state. The proposal has profound integrity.

Why do you think it's important to enshrine the Voice to Parliament in the Constitution, rather than include it only in legislation?

The history of Indigenous bodies relying on legislation & administrative determination has had no security. These bodies have been dismissed by political whim.

How could a Voice to Parliament improve the lives of your community?

A Voice established in the Constitution would ensure the basic nature of relationships between Indigenous & non-Indigenous people are established. The present unresolved relationship means Indigenous people's interests are dependent upon the majority non-Indigenous awareness & goodwill. Indigenous People must have a guaranteed base from which to advocate & realise their interests.

Why is it important for Indigenous people to have a say in the matters that affect them?

Indigenous people have a fundamental right to frame the constitutional terms upon which their presence as the First People exists. They have a right to determine their voice & the

negotiation of a Treaty requires constitutional inclusion. Relying on legislation passed in the Parliament & shaped by the government of the day remains availability to be used as a political tool & does not provide an Indigenous Voice in perpetuity.

Reconciliation of Indigenous & other Australians depends on the initiative of the First Peoples. The Uluru Statement provides the way forward for all Australians.

Yours sincerely,
Peter Renkin