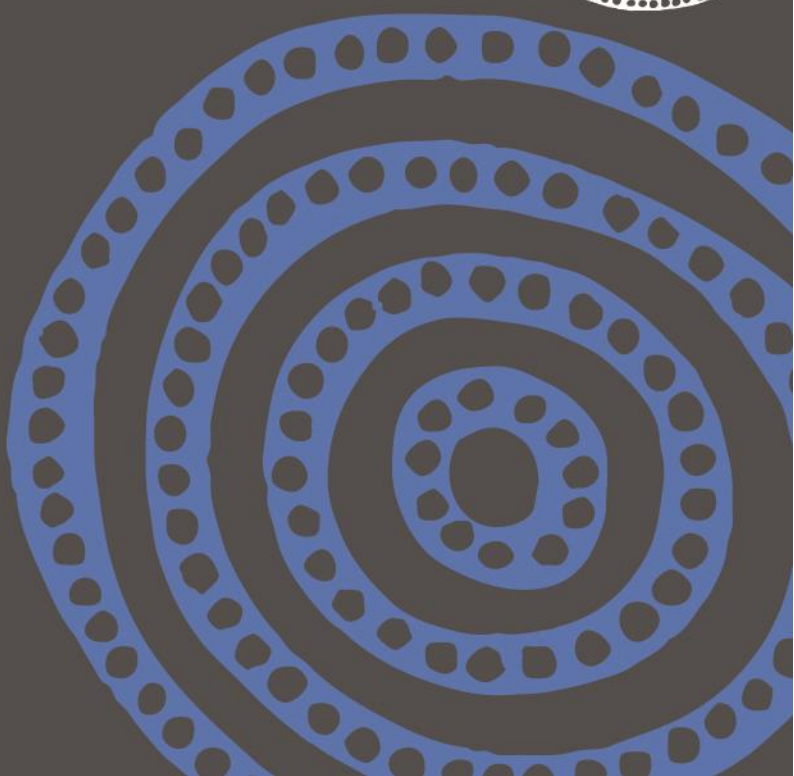


# Indigenous Voice Co-design Consultation 2021



**MISSION  
AUSTRALIA** | together  
we stand

## Submission on the Indigenous Voice Co-Design Interim Report

Mission Australia

March 2021

Mission Australia is a national non-denominational Christian charity motivated by a shared vision of an Australia where everyone has a safe home and can thrive. Since 1859, we have pursued our Founding Purpose which is, inspired by Jesus Christ, to meet human need and spread the knowledge of the love of God. In 2019-20, we supported more than 167,000 people through 483 programs and services across Australia.

As an Australian services organisation, we recognise a particular responsibility to our First Nations peoples. We acknowledge that God has been present and active in our indigenous communities since time immemorial. We acknowledge with shame the actions during European settlement of systemic injustice and dispossession, and honour the special relationship that indigenous peoples have as custodians of the land on which we meet and work.

Jesus Christ by His life and saving death reconciles His people to God, and calls us to be reconciled to one another. Therefore Mission Australia recognises the task of reconciliation as an essential aspect of our Christian work, and wholeheartedly strives for reconciliation with First Nations people through recognition, empowerment and service.

Every day we deliver homelessness crisis and prevention services, we provide social and affordable housing, and we assist struggling families and children. We help individuals and families to address their mental health issues, and fight substance dependencies, and we support people with disability to participate fully in their community and achieve their goals.

We have long worked with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as colleagues, providers of support, and as partners in our communities. Mission Australia was among the first not-for-profit organisations in Australia to develop and implement a Reconciliation Action Plan. We are a signatory to the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) *Principles for a Partnership-centred Approach* which guide the way we engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, and how we deliver services and development initiatives in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

In 2009 we established Charcoal Lane – a social enterprise restaurant and hospitality training program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Melbourne. Between 2010 and 2018 we delivered 14 dedicated Indigenous employment programs across Australia. We currently deliver services in remote communities such as Mornington Island and Yarrabah in Far North Queensland, and in the NT and WA where the communities lead our approach to supporting individuals, families, and communities.

Our genuine engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is perhaps best reflected in the people who choose to use our services; on average more than 20 percent of people accessing our community services in 2019-20 identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. This engagement is driven by our genuine commitment to working alongside and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and groups.

And currently, around six percent of our workforce identifies as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. To address employment outcomes, we have an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy and Toolkit that complements our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). In addition, we have recently launched RAP Champions, a peer to peer learning network to further build the cultural competence of our employees.

Given our engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and people, we are privileged to have the opportunity to make a submission regarding the recently released co-design models for a Voice to Parliament reflecting the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

### **Giving a voice to young people and people with disability**

We are encouraged by the inclusion of youth and disability advisory groups within the proposed National Voice structure. Mission Australia conducts an annual Youth Survey to engage young people aged 15-19 years across the country. In 2020, 25,800 young people responded to the survey and a total of 1,129 (4.4%) respondents identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people. Although this is not a representative sample, the findings indicate the concerns, hopes and plans of young people.

For the first time in 2020, young people were asked whether they had been treated unfairly in the past year. Almost four in 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people reported they had been treated unfairly (compared with only a quarter of non-Indigenous respondents). Of those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents who felt they were treated unfairly, half reported this treatment was due to their race/cultural background. Close to four in 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people cited equity and discrimination as the most important issue in Australia today.

In 2019, young people were asked whether they feel that their voices are being heard on important issues with family, friends, at school/TAFE/university and in public affairs. A third of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people felt they had no say at school/TAFE/university and more than a half had no say in public affairs.

These results demonstrate that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people want to voice their concerns and highlight what is important to them. As they are the future of the country, they need to be involved in the design, development and implementation of policies that affect them.

### **Mission Australia supports a Voice to Parliament**

The Uluru Statement from the Heart offers Australia a way forward. In part, the Statement calls for structural reforms that give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people a greater say (and authority) on the decisions that affect them. A Voice to Parliament will empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people politically, and act as a permanent institution for expressing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander views, through parliament, to the government.

Mission Australia supports the recommendations that Indigenous leadership have called for, namely:

- a. The Australian Government must honour its election commitment to a referendum once a model for the Voice has been settled;
- b. Enabling legislation for the Voice must be passed after a referendum has been held in the next term of Parliament; and
- c. The membership model for the Voice to Parliament must be open to the selection of previously unheard Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in addition to established leadership figures.

We believe that a Voice to Parliament enshrined in and protected by the Constitution is vital to ensure that the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians can move forward. Moreover, we believe that the Uluru Statement, built on more than

two years of co-design engagement, is the vehicle through which justice and self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities should be realised.