

To Co-Design Body,

I am a graduate of classics from the University of Queensland and an English teacher in Melbourne. As someone who studies Greek and Latin, and teaches English, I understand the value of languages as vehicles of culture. These three languages—Greek, Latin, and English—have all been languages of empire. In my studies, I have come to understand how easily the language of empire can destroy native tongues, and what cultural loss this entails. Native languages are a precious thing, and by way of an exemplar we Australians can look to the way Māori languages are increasingly incorporated into New Zealand schooling and government bodies.

Of course, we must also learn to appreciate other Indigenous cultural treasures: important Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sacred sites and relics are regularly destroyed with disregard to their significance. So too must we acknowledge those parts of our history that bring mourning rather than pride: many First Nations communities are still suffering and dealing with the aftermath of intergenerational trauma and massacre sites are not properly monumentalised and mourned. The 26 January cannot be a day of celebration for all Australians when it marks the beginning of two hundred years of pain, violence, and loss for its Indigenous inhabitants.

Changes cannot be effected while decision-making situations that directly affected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Voices are the ones that frustratingly are silenced and dismissed. The policy makers are not the end users. It is unfortunate that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's issues have been tossed around like a "political football", and the government often 'does things to' rather than with these communities. This is why I fully support the Uluru Statement. It makes sense for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to have a Voice in the laws of the Parliament, policies and Australian Government decisions that affect them. It makes sense to devise a system where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their communities can work in true partnership with government.

I write to support the three key positions of the National Voice. Firstly, I hold the government accountable to honouring its election commitment to a referendum once a model for the Voice has been settled. Secondly, I urge the Government to enable legislation for the Voice to be passed after a referendum has been held in the next term of Parliament. Otherwise, all this work would have been for nothing. Thirdly, I support a membership model for the National Voice that must ensure previously unheard Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have the same chance of being selected as established leadership figures.

The Voice is a turning point for the relationship between the Australian government, the Australian public, and First Nations People. The desire by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to have a greater say in the laws of the Parliament, policies and Australian Government decisions that affect them is a desire that I support as well. The Uluru Statement and Interim Voice report is balanced, well researched and aims for longevity and inter-generational benefits, rather than short-term gains. The open discussion and emphasis on dialogue, partnership, and collaboration is refreshing and rational. The observations that there is no one-size fits all model addresses a key systemic flaw which often causes repetition of the same mistakes and problems. Most importantly it is clear that it was written with people at its heart. This is good governance. This is something I want to get behind. This is something to be proud of.

Australia is blessed with abundant resources and natural beauty, but this lucky bounty was provided by the millennia of careful land management of pre-existing Indigenous Australian civilisations and culture. Enshrining a Voice into our constitution as described by the Uluru Statement is the only way that we can grow into a mature nation, and learn to balance its past, present and future; and honour its rich dual parentage and inheritance. I support the National Voice to collaborate, walk and decide together.

Thank you,

Scott Williams