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Yuggera Country

To Co-Design Body

Submission for Co-design process

I am a non-indigenous Australian who grew up in a privileged white environment ignorant of the history of Indigenous Australia. I am a professional who has worked in the field of environmental planning and assessment for over 25 years. This work has provided me the opportunity to work with a number of Aboriginal communities and to experience the deep connection that Aboriginal people have with the land and sea. The lack of self-determination in management of their land and sea country is continually apparent in my everyday work it is time white Australia recognised the fact that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples never ceded sovereignty of their lands and sea and that it is time to recognise their sovereign rights.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart is just that, it is a representative statement of the 270 plus Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups across Australia. As part of that gathering representatives agreed that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples need a Voice should be that is protected by the Australian Constitution and supported by all Australians via a referendum.

The Government must honour its election commitment to a referendum once a model for the Voice has been settled to ensure that a First Nations Voice to Parliament is protected by the Constitution, legislative change is not permanent and as with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy since Federation, it will continue to be a short-term political football. The Voice needs to have Constitutional recognition and the ability to provide advice own advice on any parliamentary business it deems relevant to its responsibility as the preeminent representative body in the structure of Government. This could not be achieved via a legislative body.

A Voice to Parliament enshrined in the Constitution means empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to have a direct say in laws and policies in conditions that enable certainty, durability and more long-term planning to secure their future. The lack of involvement of in policy development resulting in critical errors and policy implementation which do not match the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is apparent across all measures of socio-economic wellbeing.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples need their own Voice to ensure that policy and program development by government reflects their standpoint and ontologies. The lack of understanding and blanket application of policy across communities has led to the current position for a large majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples where they are over represented in measures of disadvantage and whilst we have had ten yours to 'close the gap' the shortcomings of the policy has led to the current failings.

Yours sincerely,
Julie Keane