

Hilary Kuhn

29 April 2021

Port Douglas, QLD 4877

**Indigenous Voice Secretariat Co-design Co-designVoice@niaa.gov.au
Uluru Dialogue < ilc@unsw.edu.au >**

Submission to the Interim Voice Report in support for the ‘Uluru Statement from the Heart’:

Dear Voice Secretariat,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Interim Voice Report in support for the ‘Uluru Statement from the Heart’.

I have worked closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people since 1970 and have witnessed much change over the last 50 years. During those times I have mourned the passing of so many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and the concomitant loss of their encyclopaedic knowledge.

I also have mourned the consequences of the lack of meaningful dialogue between immigrants and indigenous people in Australia. For many proponents of an increasingly irrelevant European knowledge have adhered to the colonial dictum of debasing Aboriginal people and knowledge despite recognition through the 1967 Referendum and the High Court Native Title decision in 1992.

I find the detailed Aboriginal knowledge of the ecology and hydrology of this driest inhabited continent to be astounding. For the accrual of knowledge over 65,000 years not only informs harvest of traditional foods and medicines but also qualifies seasonal cues for management of land and waters and adaptation to changes in the climate.

Indigenous knowledge is so longstanding and so comprehensive. I was privileged to learn from Aboriginal women with traditional training and knowledge. To live and work with those women in traditional country was enlightening. When an Aboriginal Elder told me of the marine transgression in the Gulf of Carpentaria 10,000 years ago, he described the impacts as though it was yesterday. For these reasons I am very embarrassed by the lack of respect and recognition of indigenous knowledge in this country by many non-indigenous people.

Over the years, I have also heard many first-hand recounts of massacres from indigenous survivors and their descendants and of the ramifications of legislation to ‘protect’/‘manage’ indigenous people who were not even acknowledged by federal and state constitutions. I am ashamed that the War Memorial provides no meaningful recognition of the frontier war and the thousands of indigenous casualties. I am also ashamed of the ‘ripoff’ by colonial governments and settlers: the ‘land grab’ and the appropriation of indigenous knowledge without acknowledgement or remuneration. The lack of a treaty has long been bemoaned by indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. This was exemplified in the extraordinary response to the 1967 Referendum and in the huge volume of non-indigenous Australians who marched for reconciliation at the bicentenary in 1988.

Given the profound impacts of British colonisation and European settlement on indigenous people and their country in Australia, I am constantly impressed how indigenous people armed with the fortitude of their traditional cultural heritage manage to leave bitterness behind to focus on new pathways that overcome conflicts of the past.

In my mind, this is the thrust of the ‘Uluru Statement from the Heart’ that invites all Australians ‘to walk with us to a better Australia’:

The Uluru Statement is an invitation to the Australian people to work with First Nations people to create a better future. It is a gift: a strategic roadmap to peace, where First Nations peoples take a rightful place in our own land. It is a moment where all Australians can come together to realise our nation’s true potential.

This roadmap, set out in the Uluru Statement, is Voice, Treaty and Truth. The path to a better Australia. But we need your voice to get there. We need you, your family, friends, organisations, and communities to rally together and to help us make this a reality. The time is now.

I welcome this invitation and extend my support.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart calls for **Constitutional Change** ‘to enshrine a First Nations Voice in the Australian Constitution that would empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’:

A Voice to Parliament enshrined in the Constitution. A First Nations Voice, protected by the Constitution, will mean that agreement-making and truth-telling can finally be done on equal terms. With Voice, we can begin the journey of coming together after a struggle – Makarrata. We are the Uluru Dialogue.

I fully support this proposal.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart also calls for **Legislative Change** that

involves the establishment of a Makarrata Commission. The Makarrata Commission would supervise a process of agreement-making with Australian governments.

I fully support this proposal.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart calls for a **Makarrata Commission** that

would also oversee a process of truth-telling about Australia’s history and colonisation.

I fully support this proposal.

It is now almost four years since the issue of the Uluru Statement from the Heart to the Australian people. When the Uluru Statement from the Heart was delivered to the federal government of Australia, there was no response.

As the federal government continues to procrastinate on any response to the Uluru Statement from the Heart, it has become apparent that a referendum of the Australian people is required:

The Referendum Council recommended that a referendum be held as soon as practicable to enshrine a Voice to Parliament and commence the journey to Voice, Treaty and Truth. The Referendum Council was confident that the detail on a Voice would be worked out after a referendum supervised by the Australian parliament. A 2018 parliamentary committee on the other hand recommended that there is more 'meat on the bones' of a Voice before can go to a referendum. Now, in 2021, the government's handpicked committee chosen to design the voice has released a report. It has asked the Australian people for their views. And following this report we believe there is plenty of information about what a Voice may look like and it is time for the government to put the Voice to the Australian people in a referendum. The Minister of Indigenous Affairs Ken Wyatt banned consideration of Uluru through the Terms of Reference for the co-design groups. Minister Wyatt has sought to ignore First Nations and public support for constitutional enshrinement. The Interim Report avoids the issue by saying, incorrectly, that the line between Parliament and the Government is thin.

Obviously, the Morrison government now needs to understand the extent of support amongst the Australian voting public for constitutional enshrinement of a First Nations Voice. I support the demands put to the Morrison Government that it must:

- Honour its election commitment to a referendum 'once a model for the Voice has been settled',
- Enable legislation for the Voice to be passed after a referendum has been held in the next term of Parliament, and
- Design a membership model for the National Voice that ensures an inclusive selection of previously unheard Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as well as established leadership.

For all Australians, the importance of a constitutionally recognised, legislated and appropriately designed indigenous Voice is urgent. For the Voice will offer a lens for unity between all Australians, indigenous and non-indigenous, informed by the wisdom of the oldest human culture in the world as exemplified by the proposal for a Makarrata Commission.

In my opinion, the Voice is our most important cultural and political imperative. Without it, there will not be any meaningful reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians, a scenario that can only be detrimental to our future as an integrated society.

Regards,

Hilary Kuhn
29 April 2021