

Dear Co-Design Body

Submission to Co-design process

I am a retired public servant, with a keen interest in human rights and social justice. I hold a Bachelor of Arts degree, majoring in English literature, from the University of NSW, and have also studied economics as a post graduate student. I spent my primary school years in Wagga Wagga, in regional NSW, and my high school years in Canberra. I have worked for non-government organisations, state government agencies and the Commonwealth Government, and I spent several years living and working in Central West NSW. I have spent the last twenty years living and working in Canberra.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart is an historic achievement. An Indigenous designed and led process that achieved **consensus support** from the more than 1200 participants. It is a roadmap to meaningful change in the way Australia supports and engages with First Nations peoples and it's an invitation from Indigenous people to all Australians to walk together to heal the deep wounds that exist in our country and to work towards a better future.

I support an Indigenous Voice to Parliament, as I believe that Indigenous peoples, like all people, are best placed to know what issues matter most to them and how policies, services and supports should be designed to have the most impact. For over 200 years, governments have largely taken a paternalistic approach to 'managing' the lives of Indigenous peoples, and with very few exceptions, the results have been disastrous. With the National Apology to Indigenous peoples, the Australian Government finally acknowledged the harm that successive government policies have caused Indigenous peoples, but practical changes in the way governments design and deliver programs and services have been too slow.

An Indigenous Voice to Parliament could improve the lives of all Australians. Firstly, it would ensure Indigenous experience informs Parliament's consideration of all legislation that directly and exclusively affects Indigenous peoples. Over time, as Parliament learns to value the wisdom and experience of Indigenous peoples, it will lead to better policies, programs and services, which in turn will result in improvements across a broad range of areas, including health, education and employment. This benefits all Australians by increasing the rich pool of human capital and potential, by reducing government outlays on welfare payments and expensive health treatment (rather than more cost-effective prevention), and by increasing tax revenue as more Indigenous peoples move into employment and better paying jobs. Secondly, it would ensure that Indigenous people's wisdom and experience informs Parliament's consideration of other legislation which affects Indigenous peoples as part of the broader Australian community. As an example, this could lead to more informed consideration of environmental issues, drawing on Indigenous peoples' deep connection with country, which is more likely to take a longer-term perspective on the consequences of proposed change.

I think it is important to enshrine the Voice to Parliament in the Constitution, rather than through legislation, once a model has been settled. I believe the Australian public will support the Voice in the Constitution and I would vote for the Voice in a Referendum.

I support the proposal to establish a Local and Regional Voice guided by a flexible principles-based framework. I support the nine principles included in the proposal. While there are administrative and cost efficiencies in having fewer larger regions, there is also a risk this will be less inclusive and representative, and so I support a greater number of smaller regions.

I support the proposal to establish a National Voice, and prefer the first option, to draw members directly from Local and Regional Voices, which was the preferred option during the co-design process. This is more likely to support the principle of inclusive participation and ensure that all Indigenous peoples have an opportunity to be heard.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Yours faithfully

Fiona Sawyers

30 April 2021