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To Co-Design Body

Submission to Co-design process

I am not indigenous. My ancestors are English, Scottish, Irish settlers. There's a pastor who was known for the whippings he gave convicts in my bloodline. There are rumours of an ancestor who was a blackbirder. It's not a history I feel particularly proud of. I was born in and continue to live in Sydney, though I've lived in Melbourne and overseas. I'm a lawyer. Before studying law I worked on human rights, migration and refugee issues. My focus was often more on international issues, and I think sometimes my gaze skipped too easily over the enormous social justice and human rights issues at home. As a solicitor I've worked on migration and refugee cases and currently work in the disability sector.

Why do you think the Uluru Statement from the Heart is important?

The Statement from the Heart was presented to the Australian people - not to politicians, not to Parliament - it is a call to action for all Australians, drawing attention to the need for our support in the face of 200+ years of government failure.

How could a Voice to Parliament improve the lives of your community?

A Voice to Parliament would improve the lives of all communities in Australia by beginning the long overdue process of mainstreaming meaningful consultation of First Nations representatives into every aspect of Australian life.

Why do you think it's important to enshrine the Voice to Parliament in the Constitution, rather than include it only in legislation?

Legislation can be amended. Legislation can be repealed. This is too important to reside only in a law. It must be in the Constitution.

Why is it important for Indigenous people to have a say in the matters that affect them?

You only need to look at the myriad health and social indicators on which First Nations peoples lag behind, or the way in which land management practices have destroyed our biodiversity and waterways to observe the harm that government without an indigenous voice has done to First Nations communities and to the land they are the traditional custodians of. All laws and policies will affect different indigenous groups in unique ways, and it is something of a no-brainer to ensure that First Nations representatives have a voice in law creation and government.

I have heard that there has been a lot of commentary around making sure that there is a model for what the Voice to Parliament would look like structurally and procedurally before we enshrine the Voice in the Constitution. While I understand why this might be a concern, I think it misses the point - that the Constitutional change must come first. A referendum is needed to amend the Constitution, not to design how the Voice will look - that will be for parliament, in consultation with First Nations representatives. Constitutional recognition is the crucial first step.

Thank you,
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