

30 April 2021

To Co-Design Body

Submission for Co-design process

I live and work in Sydney and grew up in Canberra where my mother and father settled and raised a family after their parents migrated to Australia from Latvia and the former Yugoslavia.

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

First Nations peoples have existed on this continent for more than 60,000 years, but since Europeans arrived a little over 200 years ago, many First Nations peoples have suffered great injustice and subsequent generations of trauma that no humans should have to endure. It is our responsibility – as citizens and human beings - to listen to one another and work together to support a fairer more just system for all Australians. For me, the Uluru Statement from the Heart is an earnest call to Australians to come together in truth-telling and healing. It offers a clear and courageous road map to a fairer Australia. It illuminates the path towards a more inclusive and resilient community – one that celebrates Australia's diversity and respects the many voices of the world's oldest living culture.

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

A Voice to Parliament would ensure that Aboriginal people are consulted as stakeholders on policy proposals, so policy makers would be aware of the likely impact of policy decisions on this stakeholder group, much like the consultation processes they undertake with other stakeholders. A Voice to Parliament could offer important insights and perspectives on proposed policies that would help ensure Indigenous Australians are not adversely or unfairly affected by parliamentary decision-making. In my experience, my community thrives when its members are consulted on matters affecting them and its voice is heard and respected.

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

It's important that all citizens have a say in matters affecting them. Indigenous Australians have the same rights as all Australians.

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

Governments can – and frequently do - change legislation, so enshrining the Voice to Parliament in the Constitution is essential – and the only effective mechanism if we are serious about a First Nations Voice to Parliament. It's only fair that Indigenous people have a say on issues affecting them. It's clear that Indigenous people want to find the best Voice and are genuinely seeking the support of the broader Australian public by supporting a referendum on enshrining the Voice.

My hope is for a First Nations Voice to be promptly enshrined in the Constitution. It's finally time for Australia to come of age and to do what is right. As a non-indigenous Australian, I wholeheartedly support the Uluru Statement from the Heart and look forward to the opportunity to support an enshrined First Nations Voice to Parliament in the Constitution in a referendum.

Kind regards,

Beneta Stephenson