

Submission on the Voice

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Interim Report in the Co-design process. I am an Australian citizen who grew up and lives in Sydney. Since visiting Pitjantjatjara lands in the late 1980's and travelling with ANTaR's the Sea of Hands around Australia in the late 90's I have followed Aboriginal affairs with a passionate interest. My father, a federal parliamentarian, was closely involved in the 1967 Referendum and subsequently in the Liberal government. Although I was not involved at that time, I have since come to realise how important Aboriginal culture is to Australian life, and to my work in conservation.

I support wholeheartedly the Uluru Statement of the Heart calling for a Voice to parliament enshrined in the Constitution.

The Uluru Statement is a document that can inspire all Australians. It has been offered by our Indigenous peoples as a way to walk together to right the wrongs of the past and to open a rich heritage for our nation's future.

I believe that holding a Referendum to vote 'Yes' to a Voice to parliament in the Constitution is the very best way forward. It would give the recognition that has been asked for, and promote a proper say for Aboriginal peoples in the handling of their own affairs.

Aboriginal people constantly show themselves to be creative, full of humour, wise and humane. I am totally convinced that having the empowerment of the Voice in the Constitution is the best way for Aboriginal people and particularly for children and families to flourish.

All the terrible detentions, suicides and deaths in custody, the entrenched health problems; we and our governments must respond to overcome these dreadful disadvantages. The Government has been given a true solution in the Voice and should take an unmatched advantage and accept what Aboriginal peoples have put forward.

A Referendum to this purpose would need to be supported by funding and education so that there could be no doubt of its passing, but I believe the Australian public is now ready for that step. Now is the time for real change. That is what the Government was offering to the nation, and it must stand by its promise.

I am deeply disturbed that the co-design process, as reflected in the Interim Report, has not been given the opportunity in its terms of reference to support the Voice to parliament as a first and most important step. Any sort of symbolic recognition of Aboriginal peoples in the Constitution would be less than worthless in comparison to the change that is required and that an enshrined Voice would bring.

The Interim Report has considerable detail about how the Voice would operate and others are better experienced and more properly involved than I am to consider these details. Briefly from what I have gathered it would be helpful to have equal representation of male and female; there should be guaranteed Elder representation (to align with Aboriginal ways of governance); no ministerial appointees; public accountability; the Voice needs to be able to speak to parliament and the executive in order to carry out its primary function of having input into laws that affect Aboriginal peoples and communities before those laws are enacted.

Aboriginal people, over time, will be able to suggest how the Voice should best operate, and this will be worked on by them together with parliamentary committees. This is how legislation can be considered and adapted to circumstance over time. It is not a once and forever framework, and allowing for adaptation is what conforms to best practice in any sphere of endeavour. But the proposal of a Voice to Parliament should itself be put to the Australian people in a Referendum, not as a matter of legislation which can be changed by an incoming government.

Dissent among Aboriginal peoples as to the 'how' of proceeding is natural, because their own original structures of governance have been so damaged through history since colonisation, and now it is necessary to also fit into western legal structures. So this is the time for the Government to take a lead to support the process. There is no reason not to accept the brilliant solution proposed in the Uluru Statement: walking together would allow Aboriginal peoples to flourish and be enormously enriching to the whole of Australian society.

I urge the Government to hold a Referendum as soon as practical to establish the Voice in our Constitution.

Georgina San Roque



Waverton NSW 2060