

Sally Neaves

[REDACTED]
Bathurst, NSW, 2795

To Co-Design Body

Co-design process: Submission for Sally Neaves

As an employee of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea, I am writing to express my support for the Uluru Statement from the Heart's request for an Indigenous Voice that is protected in the Constitution. I am aware of many Sisters of Mercy who have walked alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples at the grass roots. My own experience has been with the Wiradjuri people of Bathurst, NSW. Other Sisters have worked tirelessly in regional and remote Aboriginal communities. We have learned from and celebrated their ancient wisdom, witnessed their unjust suffering over many generations, and committed ourselves to the long road of advocacy toward reconciliation and recognition.

Whilst I understand that there are many voices and opinions across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, I support a constitutionally enshrined voice for Indigenous peoples. That voice will safeguard the right of self-determination and enhance the participation of Indigenous peoples in the democratic life of Australia. I urge the government to select and implement proposed models of an Indigenous Voice in full consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, in the next stage of the Co-Design Process.

It is concerning to note that the Co-Design groups were prevented from making recommendations on constitutional recognition to enshrine the Indigenous Voice. The reports of the Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition Relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples held that the Indigenous Voice Co-Design process needed to be completed before discussing its legal form.

The primary function of the Voice as a body is that it should inform legislative processes. The Voice should be protected from any changes in decision by future governments through constitutional enshrinement. It is also my hope that the membership model for the National Voice will ensure previously unheard Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the same chance of being selected as established leadership figures.

I encourage the government to actively show support for an Indigenous Voice and to educate the wider Australian public, to ensure the success of its constitutional enshrinement at a referendum. A constitutionally enshrined Voice cannot happen without bipartisan support, and I call for a spirit of openness to listen to and join with our Indigenous sisters and brothers in their call for voice, for treaty and for truth telling of our shared past.

Thank you,
Sally Neaves