



Voice Secretariat
Reply Paid 83380
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Via email: Co-designVoice@niaa.gov.au

The Salvation Army Submission – Indigenous Voice Co-design Interim Report

Dear Voice Secretariat,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our views on the Indigenous Voice Co-design Interim Report. We appreciate the work that has gone into the process to date and recognise that it is testament to the government's commitment to reconciliation. The need for an Indigenous Voice goes beyond reconciliation, it is a matter of human rights as set out in the *United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

The Salvation Army steadfastly believes that a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament is a crucial step in our nation's path to reconciliation. We acknowledge that consideration of constitutional recognition is outside the scope of the current co-design committees, but agree with the recommendation of the Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition Relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples that the government:

consider, in a deliberate and timely manner, legislative, executive and constitutional options to establish The Voice.

This Voice is the only way to ensure that Indigenous Australians have a fair say on issues that affect their families and communities, contributing to the design of legislation, policies, services and programs that are effective in closing the gap and leading to improved outcomes for those whom we walk alongside.

We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and advocates who have, for generations, called for an Indigenous Voice to help Australia achieve justice and equality. The Salvation Army's values, experience and beliefs compel us to join this chorus. Specifically, we support the recommendations identified by the Uluru Dialogue, the Indigenous Law Centre at the University of New South Wales and From the Heart:

1. The government must honour its election commitment to a referendum once a model for the Voice has been settled.
2. Enabling legislation for the Voice must be passed after a referendum has been held in the next term of Parliament.
3. The membership model for the National Voice must ensure previously unheard Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the same chance of being selected as established leadership figures.

Founders **William & Catherine Booth**
General **Brian Peddle**

*Wherever there is hardship or injustice, Salvos will live, love and fight
alongside others to transform Australia one life at a time with the love of Jesus*



Reconciliation

The Salvation Army Australia recently rolled out a comprehensive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Competency and Capability Framework. A component of that Framework is our inaugural Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) as a single, united Australian Territory. The process of developing our RAP involved a series of yarning circles – slow, intense, sometimes challenging yarns involving all parts of The Salvation Army in Australia. What developing our RAP reaffirmed for us was the importance of listening and truth telling. The Salvation Army's history with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has been not always matched the values we now hold dear – truth telling, and infinite patience on the part of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family, has provided a way through toward reconciliation.

The process of yarning circles demonstrated yet again, that listening to First Nations peoples leads to better outcomes for everyone, not just for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Developing our RAP has also strengthened our focus and resolve to do what we can to address hardship and injustice experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. We are committed to social justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and we are guided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in how to best achieve that end.

A Constitutionally Enshrined Voice

The need for a Voice protected in the Australian Constitution was informed by the experience of generations of First Nations peoples, namely that:

Previous First Nations' representative bodies (such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC)) were set up administratively or by legislation. That meant they were easily abolished by successive governments depending on their priorities. Setting up and then abolishing representative bodies cuts across progress, damages working relationships and wastes talent that could be used to solve complex problems.

In the Regional Dialogues people said they were frustrated with this chopping and changing. They wanted a long lasting and durable Voice in decisions made about their own affairs. That is the reason the Uluru Statement calls for a Voice enshrined in the Constitution. They didn't want a body that could be abolished by legislation, or with the stroke of a pen by a politician. Backed by the people at a referendum, a Voice enshrined in the Constitution can make a lasting contribution to a better future for First Nations and all Australians.¹

¹ Uluru Statement from the Heart. (n.d.). Frequently Asked Questions. *Uluru Statement from the Heart*. <https://ulurustatement.org/faqs>





As a nation, we must listen to what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people say they need. Enshrining a Voice to Parliament in the Constitution is not mere symbolism. The certainty that constitutional recognition represents offers significant practical benefit for First Nations peoples. The fact that the need to implement a constitutionally enshrined Voice is the first of 15 recommendations in the 2021 Close the Gap report demonstrates the recognised link between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples having guaranteed input into decisions that affect them and improving the health and wellbeing outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

Enabling Legislation

We appreciate that a legislative or executive mechanism to provide a forum for advice from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is administratively and logistically less complex than a constitutionally enshrined Voice. Such a mechanism would also be inferior and would not achieve a true path to reconciliation.

As you would be aware, the Constitution and legislation perform fundamentally different roles in Australia's legal and political system. It is our view that constitutional recognition of the Voice must precede, and is a necessary pre-condition of, any legislation.

This gives the Australian people the decision-making power to take this important step. It allows the Australian people, guided and supported by our elected leaders, to decide that Australia will become a nation that properly recognises and protects our ability to listen to, and learn from, First Nations peoples.

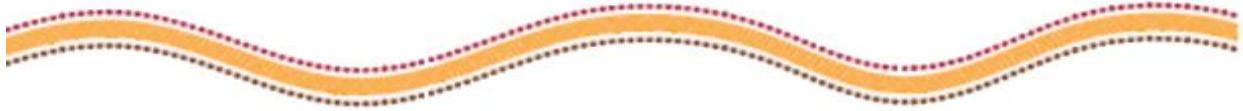
Our understanding of all discussions around a constitutionally enshrined Voice is that its role would be advisory. It would not generate or veto legislation directly. This means that the active involvement of all Australians, through a referendum process, is even more critical in ensuring that as a Nation we can realise the many benefits of constitutional recognition.

Once its existence is protected in the Constitution, there is a role for legislation to amend the shape and structure of the Voice. These amendments should reflect lessons learnt and ensure that the intent of the Voice is preserved. Critically, because constitutional recognition would already be in place, the mechanism for amending the shape and structure of the Voice would already ensure that the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is central to any amendments.

Representing Diversity

The Salvation Army recognises the diversity represented amongst First Nations peoples and believe that a Voice that is representative of this diversity will only strengthen its ability to perform its role.





It is important that previously unheard Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the same chance of being selected as those whose names are more widely known. Recognising that First Nations people from urban, regional and remote Australia bring different experiences and insights, the selection of National Voice members needs to also be representative of this diversity.

It is our experience, across our entire mission and ministry, that First Nations voices help build better policy and outcomes, not just for First Nations peoples, but for all of us. This is what we want for The Salvation Army and it is what we want for Australia.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share our views. Please do not hesitate to contact me on 0413 830 201 or at government.relations@salvationarmy.org.au if we can provide any further clarification or if a meeting would be of assistance in the important work you do.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Hateley, Major
Head of Government Relations
The Salvation Army Australia

30 April 2021

The Salvation Army acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters throughout Australia.

We pay our respect to Elders and acknowledge their continuing relationship to this land and the ongoing living cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia.

We also acknowledge future aspirations of all First Nations peoples. Through respectful relationships we will work for the mutual flourishing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and non-Indigenous Australians.

We commit ourselves in prayer and practice to this land of Australia and its people, seeking reconciliation, unity and equity.

