

Susan Reid
[REDACTED]
Broadway NSW 2007

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To Co-Design Body

Re: Submission to Co-design process

I am a PhD candidate at the University of Sydney. I am a writer, creative researcher and lawyer with a double Masters – one in Design from the University of Technology Sydney and the other in International Law from the Australian National University. My professional background includes arts management, community cultural development, contributions to the federal public service developing Australia's intellectual property regime, environmental protection and advocacy, and creative practices.

My ancestors were among the very early wave of English/Irish colonisers of what would become the nation of Australia. I understand one of them was a convict (artist who stole a lock of hair). My family have, for the most part lived on the East Coast of Australia, mostly between Yugambeh (Gold Coast) and Gumbaynggirr (Macksville/Nambucca) lands and Country. I was raised on these lands and in Bougainville, Papua New Guinea, where I was born. I currently live and work between Gadigal and Yugambeh lands.

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

It is 2021 and this nation has stalled long enough from listening to and reconciling with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island leaders. The government must now recognise with maturity and responsibility the gesture of coming together reflected in the Uluru Statement from the Heart. Australia is the last of the colonised countries to adopt a Treaty and embark on processes and real change toward truth and reconciliation.

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

To be clear, for the purposes of this submission, I am thinking of 'my community' here as this nation. The Australian Constitution was written by a white, male Europeans during a series of conventions in the late 1800s. It is anachronistic and authored by a small group of people who do not reflect the lived experiences of First Nation peoples, or Australia's complex and diverse multi-cultural communities. Our contemporary nation is a construct of settler colonialism. It is built on unceded lands and through the violences and injustices of frontier wars, waged all across this continent, against Indigenous peoples. During my school years, I learnt nothing about this history that has caused so much pain for Indigenous peoples. Neither did I learn anything about the rich, complex, spiritual, creative and intellectual dimensions of Indigenous cultures.

I glean nothing of this rich culture or the truth of how this nation was founded from our Constitution.

I am now in my fifties and, only in the past few decades, have I begun researching, learning and better understanding the beauty and complexity of Indigenous cultural foundations, languages, ecological and other knowledges that for too long have remained unrecognised and absent from our national education, experience and expression and leadership. For too long, this nation's political leaders have suppressed the shameful injustices against Indigenous Australians - the denial of these histories makes a sham of our nationhood.

The Australian Constitution reads like an administrative manual rather than a guiding, visionary, and motivating document that can bring this nation into maturity, together. I believe that enshrining a Voice to Parliament in the Constitution can begin to mend the injustice of lack of recognition and begin to infuse our nation's guiding document with a unique, unifying voice that resonates honestly and generously with this nation's history and future, together.

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

A Voice to Parliament is truth-telling in action. From the background documentation that I have read about this process, unless it has constitutional protection, truth-telling is simply tokenism without real action. We have all seen how legislation is vulnerable to repeal, and random amendments. The Voice is too important for that to happen – it is too foundational and should be more enduring than legislation. It must be inalienable and enshrined in the Constitution.

Why is it important for Indigenous people to have a say in the matters that affect them?
As a matter of basic human rights, people whose lives are impacted by State decisions should have a say in those matters. Our government leaders should listen well to better hear of the suffering of Indigenous peoples and the experiences and intergenerational impacts of settler colonial injustices, frontier wars, stolen children, stolen lands, wage theft, genocide and ongoing racist policies.

Indigenous people have the detailed knowledge of matters that affect them; and can better contribute to the insights and design of community, health, cultural, educational, and justice policies and programs that concern and affect them. I am sickened that in 2021 this has to be spelled out to the Australian government leaders and that certain patronising colonial attitudes continue to obstruct justice.

A Voice to Parliament is a step toward Indigenous self-determination within Australia's governance framework and makes sense for cultural, political, economic and global leadership reasons.

As with the Uluru Statement the Heart, the proposal for a Voice to Parliament resonates with grace and generosity.

In summary:

1. The Government must honour its election commitment to a referendum once a model for the Voice has been settled to ensure that a First Nations Voice to Parliament is protected by the Constitution;
2. Enabling legislation for the Voice must be passed after a referendum has been held in the next term of Parliament; and
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 The only acceptable reform is a First Nations Voice to Parliament protected by the Constitution. I urge all who can make this happen to be on the right side of history!

Thank you,
Susan Reid