

## **Submission to the Co-Chairs of the Indigenous Voice Senior Advisory Group on The Design and Proposal of the National Indigenous Voice to Parliament**

By Todd Fernando

Attention: Professor Dr Marcia Langton AO and Professor Tom Calma AO,

I welcome the opportunity to make this submission to the Indigenous Voice Senior Advisory Group on the Design and Proposal of the National Indigenous Voice to Parliament. I also welcome the contribution made to the Design and Proposal of the National Indigenous Voice to Parliament and take this time to compliment the Senior Advisory Group on achieving extensive consultation with diverse members of the Indigenous Australian community.

By way of context, I am a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Melbourne with a research focus that has practical implications for improving the health and wellbeing outcomes of the LGBTIQ+ Indigenous community in Victoria and across Australia. I have demonstrated a deep understanding of the LGTIQA+ Indigenous communities throughout my research, and I am a respected expert within this field. Over the past ten years, I have become a reliable go-to person for exploratory workshops, focus groups and consultations on matters about LGBTIQ+ Indigenous communities.

My doctoral research, titled: *A Desire to be Seen: factors shaping the health and identity of queer Indigenous Australians*, found that LGTIQA+ Indigenous people feel excluded from the social fabric of Indigenous culture and polity. As a result, this population face several barriers to access to high-quality healthcare, ongoing discrimination in the workplace as a result of their sexual or gender identities, in addition to any racial discrimination they face. My research also found that LGTIQA+ Indigenous people feel excluded from the decision-making process on policy or matters that affect their lives. The current design of policies that affect Indigenous populations is often devoid of diversity and inclusive practices. As a result, attempts to improve Indigenous Australians' socio-economic-political inequalities are met with further marginalisation of the broader Indigenous communities' sub-cultural groups, including women, children, young people, and other factors like sexuality.

I welcome the proposal for the National Indigenous Voice to Parliament to embed National Voice Advisory Groups for key populations like young people and people living with a disability. I recommend that the Indigenous Voice Senior Advisory Group recognise the unique needs and issues facing LGBTIQ+ Indigenous people. As a result, I urge the Senior Advisor Group to understand that this population is not currently represented appropriately within the Design or Proposal of the National Indigenous Voice to Parliament or in community settings.

Therefore, I strongly recommend that the proposed National Voice have a permanent LGBTIQ+ Advisory Group made up of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with lived experience of being Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (brotherboy and sistergirl), Intersex, Queer, Asexual, and other identities. This would be a group the National Voice can call on to ensure the impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ people are considered when relevant to any advice being sought by the Parliament or Government. This group would also bring any matter it thinks is critical to the attention of the National Voice. The LGBTIQ+ Advisory Group would not replace or undermine any existing bodies or structures.

I would be happy to provide any further information or answer questions as required and thank the Indigenous Voice Senior Advisory Group for the opportunity to make this submission.

Todd Fernando

  
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