



Women's Climate Justice Collective Victoria – Submission to the Indigenous Voice co-design process

The Women's Climate Justice Collective (WCJC) is a collective of people from across Australia. Our mission is to 1) mainstream intersectional feminist climate justice; 2) support women and non-binary people in the feminist and climate justice movements; and 3) demand that intersectional feminism is incorporated into the climate justice movement and climate justice is incorporated into the feminist movement. We aim to bring more feminists and feminist perspectives into the climate movement to build capacity and consciousness. We also aim to illuminate in feminist spaces and groups, how the climate crisis especially affects women and the need for gender-just climate solutions.

We know that climate justice is not possible without justice for First Nations peoples, for a number of reasons. First Nations peoples' ways of life and connection to Country are being destroyed by the actions of extractive industries and the wider climate crisis. Examples include rising sea levels, erosion and coral bleaching threatening islands in the Torres Strait [1], and the mining company Rio Tinto destroying 46,000 year-old culturally significant sites at Juukan Gorge in 2020 [2]. First Nations people are also active participants in the response to the climate crisis, with unique wisdom gained from living holistically with the land for over 65,000 years and their leadership in movements to protect Country. Such movements include "Standing our Ground" - the Wangan and Jagalingou Tribal Warriors fight against the Adani Carmichael coal mine [3], the Djab Wurrung Heritage Protection Embassy to protect 800 year old sacred birthing trees on Djab Wurrung country [4] and many, many more.

However, First Nations peoples' ability to respond to the climate crisis, lead movements, and share wisdom regarding how to live more sustainably with the land, is hampered by the issues affecting them every day in this country. Inequality, disenfranchisement, incarceration, neglect, abuse, deaths in custody and exclusion from non-Indigenous led environmental movements are some examples raised by Gunnai and Gunditjmara woman and Greens senator Lidia Thorpe [5]. These issues are all compounded by a lack of adequate First Nations representation in the political system. It is important to note Lidia Thorpe's comments on the Greens First Nations Network policy: "our policy affirms that Treaty and truth-telling are foundational processes to make sure any changes in the constitution are meaningful and not just tokenistic. A 'Treaty first' approach is essential to ensure that sovereignty is recognised" [6].

Reflecting on the points raised above, it is clear to us that First Nations people need to have a voice regarding the issues that affect them, as is their right. At WCJC, we support the recommendations of the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the co-design process to establish a First Nations Voice to Parliament. To ensure that the Voice is truly inclusive, sustainable and effective, we raise that:

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.

Justice for First Nations people through the establishment of the Voice, Truth and Treaty as recommended by the Uluru Statement from the Heart would be positive for every person on this continent and the environment in which we live. The climate crisis is an existential threat facing every single one of us, and continued division will not solve it. Now is the time for us to work through the issues of the past, support one another and move forward together towards a more just, sustainable future.

References

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