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Dear Co-Design Body

Submission for Co-design process

I was born in 1967 and grew up in Aranda. An affluent white suburb in Canberra. The adjacent suburbs were called Cook and Macquarie. At Aranda Primary we thought we were pretty cool to have aboriginal names for our streets and suburb. The first indigenous person I ever saw was at the Tent Embassy on the lawns... when I was very young. The shock and embarrassment of the obviously nasty and unfair and arrogant and racist treatment by my people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has remained with me ever since. I have been an overseas exchange student, a musician, a traveller, a public servant in immigration for ten years, a plumber, a high school teacher. I have a twenty year old son who is studying theatre. I am currently unable to work due to depression (following a breakdown after working in public high schools for twenty years). I currently live near one of the last islands of bush near Salt Pan creek in southern Sydney.

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

The Uluru Statement of the Heart is important because it will return at least some idea of the sovereignty that was violently and devastatingly stolen by a foreign culture. Acknowledgement that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign nations of the Australian continent, that sovereignty was never ceded and that it can co-exist with the sovereignty of the Crown is the least any honest, thoughtful person should concede. It should have been included in the constitution in 1901. It is also the bringing together of voices. From personal experience I know there is so much confusion, on the part of black and white people, about indigenous issues, culture, history, solutions, etc. and this just feeds racism and the grotesque urban myths that are perpetuated in our society. This cacophony can only be solved with unity and it starts with a unified voice.

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

The irony is a Voice to Parliament would not adversely affect the lives or livelihood of any white person I know. I speak with friends who are vehemently opposed to this but they seem to not want to acknowledge the fact that it would only enrich their lives. I quote my best friend from Aranda Primary who said today, "Why don't they just get over it...they get enough anyway...what are the cops supposed to do when they sniff petrol and get drunk all the time...(to me) why don't you worry about the 90% hard working Aussies who are contributing to this country, not these whingeing bludgers?" I personally think such statements are evidence of a deep psychological wound. One of my son's friends; white, intelligent, privileged, said to me, "Why should I feel guilty about what people did in the past? I shouldn't have to suffer for that!" There's always a vague feeling that giving back to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is somehow a trampling of their rights; a slight to their own culture, an ignominious defeat, a sunset on their supremacy. A Voice to Parliament, by the simple fact of its existence, however would enrich such people of my community's lives by extricating this deep guilty feeling that must be the root cause of such passionate intensity. It would also help me by hopefully giving me the tools to make intelligent and smart rejoinders to such outrage

constructively, rather than having conversations with my friends and family members dissolve into hurtful slanging matches .

Why is it important for Indigenous people to have a say in the matters that affect them?

It is self evident that every single person in the world should have a say in the matters that affect them. The clash of cultures, which produces such things as the shocking numbers of black deaths in custody, can only be solved by more self determination. The ongoing genocide of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the watering down of culture and traditional life will continue until there is self determination or until 65 000 years is history is wiped away for good. One or the other. I hope the traditional way of life of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will not disappear; in fact I would like to see it lived in large areas of this country. I personally can find nothing positive to say about western capitalist civilisation, but I'm stuck in it. It's not healthy, sustainable or noble in it's heart. A healthy and secure society comes about from accepting, celebrating and respecting differences not trying to blot them out. If I could apply to go and live in a sovereign state where the traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life was lived I would; and I would make sure I could pass all their entry tests and respect all their rules and laws.

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

I've been fascinated by indigenous culture for over 50 years. I have attended countless rallies, marches, meetings, smoking ceremonies, organised school NAIDOC events, run the Boy's Didg group at my high school, spoken many Acknowledgments of Country and am frankly tired and frustrated and appalled by the lack of progress and change to, for want of a better, more detailed, expression, the Gap. Nothing really seems to change other than cynical acknowledgments and signs on the highway saying "Welcome to Darkinjung Country", when in reality it's clearly not Darkinjung country. Having a voice enshrined in the constitution would finally give indigenous people the assurance that self determination can flourish. It would also be a kind of insurance against the vagaries of populism.

I think the Voice to Parliament would bring together the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people crying in the bush. The Interim Voice Report sets out a workable process to bring the varied voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes together into not necessarily a powerful voice, but a clear one. There are many stories that must be heard but there are also hundreds of urban myths that must be cleared up. A Voice to Parliament would not only save the culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people but give white Australians, and all other migrants, an authority they can recognise, trust, listen to, turn to, talk with and respect.

Thank you,
Thomas Read