

## **Submission to the Interim Voice Report – Emma Maple-Brown – 29 April 2021**

My name is Emma Maple-Brown and I am a lawyer and mother. As someone whose career has largely focused on working in the area of human rights law and supporting and assisting vulnerable and disadvantaged clients I strongly support and endorse the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

The process which the Referendum Council undertook to conduct dialogues with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from communities across Australia to determine what recognition would look like to them led to the historic consensus expressed in the Uluru Statement from the Heart. The grace with which these communities extended their hands to the Australian people to walk together gives me much hope that together we can work towards a better future. A future in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will have a genuine and permanent say on laws and matters which affect them directly.

After working for some years on law reform and in the area of transitional justice, I know that the most effective change and reform comes from genuinely listening to the people who are most deeply affected. For this reason, I am concerned about suggestions that an appropriate response to the Uluru Statement from the Heart would be to put in place a legislated Voice. The Dialogues made clear that to be effective and fulfill its purpose the Voice needs to be enshrined in the Constitution. It cannot be a vehicle subject to the whim of the government of the day. It is important that we listen and do not ignore the voices of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who worked tirelessly towards the Uluru Statement from the Heart. If we listen to those voices, it is abundantly clear that the Voice must be enshrined. Anything less than that will merely be symbolic and not accord with the wishes of First Nations peoples.

I am concerned that Prime Minister Morrison has expressed a view that he is not convinced that the Australian people wish to go to a referendum on the question of an enshrined Voice to Parliament for First Nations people. It is for this reason that I have written this submission – to show our current government that there is a real and genuine desire from many Australian people to accept the invitation expressed in the Uluru Statement from the Heart and to enshrine a Voice for First Nations people in our Constitution. I believe the Australian people must be allowed to show their support through a national referendum and that referendum will provide crucial authority and legitimacy to the Voice by the Australian people.

I therefore fully support the Uluru Statement leadership in saying:

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 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.