

Submission in response to Indigenous Voice Discussion Paper

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission in response to the Indigenous Voice Discussion Paper.

I live on the land of the Gadigal people in today's Sydney region. I recognise that the Gadigal people, and other First Nations peoples, never ceded sovereignty and that today's Australian society stands on lands forcibly taken from them in a process of imposed and often violent colonisation. The great historical injustices that flowed from this process of colonisation have yet to be addressed by our society and its structures, processes and culture.

I grew up in a family that recognised the historical and continuing injustices done to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Family members have acted over decades to support the rights of First Nations peoples and to address the many injustices imposed on those peoples by our society. As a student at Sydney University, I took part in the 1965 Freedom Ride led by Charles Perkins and I worked with Frank Hardy and many others to support the Gurindji people in their historic struggle for land rights in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

I believe that one highly important action Australia and Australians could take to address the continuing injustices, discrimination and disadvantages of First Nations peoples would be to include in the Australian Constitution a clear statement that recognises the true history of our nation and to enshrine in that Constitution a Voice to Parliament for First Nations peoples.

From the beginning, the Australian Constitution has benefited white Australians at the expense of the country's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is time to rectify that. It is time for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices to be enshrined in the constitution, to negotiate treaties with traditional custodians, and for all Australians to gain a better understanding of the land we inhabit. Only then can we begin the processes of healing this divided nation.

I join with many others in supporting the following three crucial demands for meaningful action to address the above ongoing injustices that diminish our nation.

1. The government must honour its election commitment to hold a Referendum of Australian citizens once the model for the Voice has been settled.
2. Enabling legislation for the Voice must be passed after a Referendum has been held in the next term of Parliament.
3. The membership model for the National Voice must ensure that previously unheard Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the same chance of being selected as established leadership figures.

Enshrining a Voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Constitution will contribute to a just recognition for First Nations peoples and will progress the struggle for sovereignty and self-determination.

Thank you for considering this and other submissions. I look forward to an outcome that reflects the clearly stated wishes of First Nations peoples, that will advance and heal our nation, and that will make all Australians proud.

Regards and best wishes

Brian Aarons