

RESPONSE to the INTERIM REPORT by John van Riet (Original Submission No. 14)

1. Thank you to all members of the JSCCR Committee for the Interim Report. It has been a fascinating read, in which I learned much but also recognised how complex the issues are.
2. I was daunted by the number of Questions for consultation. However I have endeavoured to respond to those I felt I could.

National voice

Function and Operation

- If the primary purpose of the Voice is to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander voices are heard whenever the Commonwealth Parliament exercises its power to make laws under sections 51(26) and 122 of the constitution, then why not let the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples become the Voice. It is the peak representative body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including over 180 organizations and 9000 individuals. At present its staff is small, but with more funding for additional staffing, it could become effective in its deliberations and presentations. It also has the big plus of gender equality in all elected positions.
- Apart from sections 51 and 122 in the constitution, such a Voice should also have the right to comment and advice on other matters, especially in regards to health, education and housing.
- The Voice should have a say on the provision of services by government, to ensure it is done appropriately and effectively.
- The Voice should also have the power to review government expenditure in such a way as to bring recommendations to the government.

Structure and Membership

- Let the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples be the Voice. It would save much time effort and money.
- Has the model of the Sami Parliaments such as in Norway, Sweden and Finland, been examined or is this option and the idea of two parliaments in Australia not likely to succeed?

Establishment and Implementation

- If the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples became the Voice, but with increased staffing, would it not be the most cost effective?

Agreement making and Truth-telling

- See my original submission to the Committee (No.14)

- Following the publication of the Stolen Children's report by the Human Rights Commission, I was involved in a group in Traralgon, Victoria, that met to discuss the report, but above all, met with local aboriginal people. Non-aboriginal members of the group listened and learned directly from the stolen children and their families. It was a moving experience which brought us closer together.
- Could not a similar process of truth-telling be encouraged through local councils and churches, inviting aboriginal and non-aboriginal people to meet in small groups and learn of the local history of aboriginal people, including any stories of massacres? Such truth-telling could also display historical exhibits and encourage signage at or near massacre sites.