

Dear committee members,



I write to propose a simple way for the first-people of Australia to have a voice to parliament without contentious elements that are likely to be politically unpalatable.

I would like to see 7 seats without voting rights in the senate for respected elders who are elected by all Australian voters and for those seat-holders to speak on any issue they choose.

It would work like this:

- At each election all Australian voters would choose an Elder for their state (and one for all territories) along with their local MP and senators
- Elected Elders would be able to speak in the senate (and joint sittings) on any matter
- Elected Elders would be able to participate in senate (and joint house) committees and hearings
- Elected Elders would not be able to participate in divisions
- Elected Elders would have allowances (for staff, travel, etc.) the same as back-bench senators

The list of Elders would be:

1. Nominated by Australians (similar to the Australian of the Year nominations)
2. Checked by the Electoral Commission for:
 - Ancestral ties to the state/territory
 - Support of their community
 - Criminal background
3. Given equal support by the Electoral Commission for the campaign with:
 - Funding (paying for legitimate expenses)
 - Advice (legal and practical)

I believe this is the best solution for recognition and reconciliation because:

1. It allows all Australians to participate
2. It allows aboriginal people to speak on any issue
3. It recognises that aboriginal people are not just one group and that what affects the communities in each state or territory may be very different from the others so many points of view ought to be expressed to and in the parliament
4. It does not use race to give one part of the community extra power to write laws
5. It votes in people (individuals) to represent their communities and those individuals can be kept accountable (voted out) by their communities if they don't adequately represent the communities' views
6. It does not create a bureaucracy
7. It does not change the balance of power in the parliament
8. It does not prescribe what issues need to have (or not have) an indigenous opinion
9. It affords aboriginal people respect by saying "As the traditional owners of this land we want to hear your opinion with respect to all laws that apply in this great country"
10. It is symbolically consistent with our flag's Federation Star
11. It provides a genuine opportunity for non-partisan conscience-based opinion to be heard because, with Elders unable to vote, they are less likely to be politically aligned to the major political parties

12. It allows aboriginal people (who would otherwise have for numerous reasons found it difficult to have their voice heard) to receive public attention which can be very beneficial should an Elder wish to enter politics-proper and stand for election to the house or senate in subsequent elections
13. It allows respected Elders to be elected regardless of their wealth
14. It does not create a "honey-pot" that can easily be corrupted by influential or domineering groups
15. It does not conflate the separate goals of "having a voice" versus "delivering services"
16. It recognises that reconciliation is unlikely to be achieved by any single action and that Elders should continue to speak on behalf of their communities in pursuit of reconciliation and harmony

My hope is that Elders will gain the gravitas of the governor general such that politicians would avoid direct criticism for fear of a public backlash.

I look forward to reading the findings of the joint select committee.

Have a great day!

Kind regards

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Rob Wade

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