

James Missiolo, Paul Sakhal

Noel Pearson will invoke former prime minister John Howard and urge Australians to seize our "last best hope" for reconciling the nation in the upcoming referendum, just a day after the No camp's Nyunggal Warren Mundine declared the Uluru Statement from the Heart was a declaration of war against modern Australia.

Uluru Dialogue co chair Megan Davis invoked Mundine's characterization of the 2017 statement, which proposed a Voice, insisting the landmark document was "an expression of peace and love to the Australian people".

In a National Press Club speech today, Voice architect Pearson will strike an optimistic tone by saying the referendum wording completed what Howard, the most influential Coalition prime minister in recent history, called "the profound, unfolding and compelling story of Australia".

"This referendum is testing the idea that a nation conceived in the fiction of Terra Nullius - a continent empty of owners - can come to a new understanding of who we are," Pearson will say, according to draft speech notes.

"If affirmed, this referendum will seize our first best chance and last best hope for a lasting settlement.



Nyunggal Warren Mundine yesterday. Photo: Alex Ellinghausen

"Australia will start a new chapter, and the nations of the earth will learn that with justice, what remains wrong can be put right."

In his firebrand speech to the press club yesterday, Mundine - one of the most prominent members of the No campaign - claimed the Yes campaign is built on a "litany of lies", as he disputed the claim that 80 per cent

of Australia's first people back the Voice proposal.

He described the Voice as "a political ploy to grab power, not just from the Australian nation but also from traditional owners themselves", and argued it is "another lie" that the body would change Indigenous lives for the better.

"If this was true, the gap would already be closed because Indig-

enous voices have been giving advice to governments for decades. The fact is that Indigenous bodies can give bad advice," he said.

He argued that "as Aboriginal people, we have a choice: to continue to feel angry and aggrieved - to be trapped in the past - or to draw a line in history and move on from a clean slate".

"The Uluru Statement comes

from this place of continuing to grieve. It couldn't be further from the idea of reconciliation... it sees Indigenous Australians as trapped in victimhood and oppression."

Despite the fact Australia is on track to meet just four of the 19 closing the gap targets, and Indigenous Australians are eight years younger, on average, than other Australians, Mundine argued that "most Indigenous Australians are doing fine. They go to school, go to work, run businesses, take care of their families and they are not in prison. They don't need a special Indigenous Voice."

He said the biggest lie of all from the Yes campaign is that he and colleagues in the No camp don't want things to improve for Indigenous people.

He argued there are four critical areas that need to be addressed: accountability for the billions already spent on Indigenous communities; ensuring Indigenous kids go to school; increasing economic participation and social change to end violence and abuse in communities.

He denied Australia's international standing would be harmed by a No result, saying he sat on the board of international mining companies and Americans and Europeans "couldn't give a crap" about the referendum outcome.

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