



Leader of the Opposition

Senate F&PA Committee
Tabled Document

Inquiry Supplementary Estimates 2017-18

Date / Time 27/10/17

Witness Name Senator Jenny McAllister

Organisation

Hon Malcolm Turnbull
Prime Minister
Parliament House
Canberra 2600

Dear Prime Minister,

Thank you for your letter of this evening in relation to Constitutional Recognition of First Nations Peoples.

It is deeply disappointing that your government has chosen to reject the clear and unambiguous calls from First Nations Peoples for a Voice to Parliament.

As I have said to you, there is no doubt that the proposals put forward by the Referendum Council and the Uluru Statement are ambitious, and would require strong, bipartisan leadership if they are to be achieved.

Nevertheless, the Council and the Uluru recommendations reflect the views of the majority of people consulted especially through the extensive dialogue process that culminated in the summit at Uluru.

I maintain that we have a duty to do whatever we can to give effect to the legitimate aspirations of First Nations Australians for a more meaningful role in our democracy, including undertaking any further work that might be needed to clarify the roles and functions of any new body.

At no stage in this process have I believed that these matters are beyond us. Indeed I made it clear at the joint meeting with the Referendum Council that I was of the view we could get it done, if only we had the will.

That your government has chosen to reject the proposals without first undertaking any meaningful work indicates, at best, a reluctance to listen to the views of First Nations Peoples, or to show the necessary leadership on this issue.

It strikes me that a unilateral decision of this kind runs contrary to your repeated promise to do things with Indigenous Australians, and not to them.

It is not for us to dictate to First Nations Australians what form their recognition should take. Surely, the past two centuries have at least taught us that. Surely it is time for our nation to be more honourable and respectful of First Nations People.

Labor will consider in good faith your proposal for a Joint Select Committee and proposed terms of reference. However, such a committee should not be fettered by a starting point where your Cabinet has unilaterally rejected the preferred consensus position of so many First Nation leaders.

I urge you to not hastily turn away from this challenge to move our nation forward on the back of one Cabinet discussion.

The recognition of First Nations People goes to the heart of our national credibility and international reputation.

Unity in our diversity is achievable if we have the will and resolve to make it happen.

Yours sincerely,

Bill Shorten

27 October 2017