

ADDRESS TO GARMA FESTIVAL

SPEECH

30 Jul 2022

Prime Minister

Check against delivery

Ngarra ga Buku guru-pan Gumatj, Yothu Yindi nha go Yolgnu mala.

[Translation: I pay my respect to Gumatj, Yothu Yindi and Yolngu Mala.]

I acknowledge the people of the Yolngu nation. I recognise all the elders, leaders and families who have made great contributions to our nation.

In particular, I acknowledge the Gumatj clan whose lands we are meeting on today.

Last night's Bungul was a deeply moving moment for me, it was an honour to bear witness to dance and song and story and tradition tracing back some 60,000 years.

As the breeze came across me, your ancestors' presence in these lands and waters makes real your 60,000 years and more, custodianship of this land.

And I was also grateful for the chance to meet, again, with Gallarwuy and share in his wisdom, to talk about the opportunities and the challenges in this special part of Australia.

Friends,

I am delighted to be back at Garma for my fourth visit - and I am delighted Garma is back.

Here - on what **is, was** and **always** will be Aboriginal land – Today, I re-affirm my Government's solemn promise to implement the Uluru Statement from the Heart, in full.

I'm joined by my colleagues:

- Linda Burney, the Minister for Indigenous Australians
- Senator Patrick Dodson, Special Envoy for Reconciliation and the Implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart

- Senator Malarndirri McCarthy, Assistant Minister for Indigenous Australians and Indigenous Health
- Attorney General Mark Dreyfus
- Luke Gosling, the Member for Solomon
- Chief Minister Natasha Fyles
- And our new Member for Lingiari, Marion Scrymgour

And in the spirit of co-operation, which is so necessary – can I acknowledge the Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Julian Leeser.

Thanks, Julian. I look forward to working with you.

We are all here, eager to work with you, to bring our commitment to Uluru to life.

To see Australia answer that gracious, patient call for respect and truth and unity.

The Uluru Statement is a hand outstretched, a moving show of faith in Australian decency and Australian fairness from people who have been given every reason to forsake their hope in both.

I am determined, as a Government, as a country, that we grasp that hand of healing, we repay that faith, we rise to the moment.

To work with you in lifting the words off the page and lifting the whole nation up:

- With a new spirit of partnership between government and First Nations people
- Through the work of Makarrata, treaty-making and truth-telling
- And by enshrining a Voice to Parliament, in the Constitution.

We approach these tasks and the work of constitutional change, with humility and with hope.

Humility: because over 200 years of broken promises and betrayals, failures and false starts demand nothing less.

Humility because – so many times - the gap between the words and deeds of governments has been as wide as this great continent.

But also **hope**.

Hope in your abilities as advocates and campaigners, as champions for this cause.

And hope because I believe the tide is running our way. I believe the momentum is with us, as never before.

I believe the country is ready for this reform.

I believe there is room in Australian hearts for the Statement from the Heart.

We are seeking a momentous change – but it is also a very simple one.

It's not a matter of special treatment, or preferential power.

It's about consulting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on the decisions that affect you.

Nothing more – but nothing less.

This is simple courtesy, it is common decency.

It recognises the centuries-old failure that my dear friend Paul Keating spoke of at Redfern, the failure to ask the most basic human question: *how would I feel, if this were done to me?*

And along with common courtesy, it is common sense.

Respect **works**.

When a government listens to people with experience, with earned knowledge of kinship and country and culture and community...

...when we trust in the value of self-determination and empowerment...

...then the policies and programs are always more effective.

We see it with:

- Justice Reinvestment
- Indigenous Rangers
- Respecting Homelands
- And the National Partnership Agreement process driven by the Coalition of Peaks and the remarkable Pat Turner.

There are success stories out there – but we know they are not universal.

Enshrining a Voice in the Constitution gives the principles of respect and consultation, strength and status.

Writing the Voice into the Constitution means a willingness to listen won't depend on who is in government or who is Prime Minister.

The Voice will exist and endure outside of the ups and downs of election cycles and the weakness of short-term politics.

It will be an unflinching source of advice and accountability.

Not a third chamber, not a rolling veto, not a blank cheque.

But a body with the perspective and the power and the platform to tell the government and the parliament the truth about what is working and what is not.

To tell the truth – with clarity, with conviction.

Because a Voice enshrined in the Constitution cannot be silenced.

Friends,

I believe the best way to seize the momentum is by settling - as soon as possible - on the referendum question that will be put to the people of Australia.

Now, I respect the fact that many people have done a power of good work to bring us to this point, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander campaigners, best represented by the delegates to the Uluru Convention in 2017.

I am grateful and I honour everyone who has made a contribution to the process.

And now, I am hoping we can draw those threads together.

I am hoping we can progress the efforts of good-willed, hard-working people who want to see the nation move forward and justice realised.

Recognising that this is one of the steps in our nation's journey of healing.

Our starting point is a recommendation to add three sentences to the Constitution, in recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the First Peoples of Australia:

- 1. There shall be a body, to be called the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice.*
- 2. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice may make representations to Parliament and the Executive Government on matters relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.*
- 3. The Parliament shall, subject to this Constitution, have power to make laws with respect to the composition, functions, powers and procedures of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice.*

These draft provisions can be seen as the next step in the discussion about constitutional change.

This may not be the final form of words – but I think it's how we can get to a final form of words.

In the same way, alongside these provisions, I would like us to present the Australian people with the clearest possible referendum question.

We should consider asking our fellow Australians something as simple, but something as clear, as this:

Do you support an alteration to the Constitution that establishes an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice?

A straightforward proposition.

A simple principle.

A question from the heart.

We can use this question - and the provisions - as the basis for further consultation.

Not as a final decision but as the basis for dialogue, something to give the conversation shape and form.

I ask all Australians of goodwill to engage on this.

Respectfully, purposefully we are seeking to secure support for the question and the associated provisions in time for a successful referendum - in this term of Parliament.

If not now, when?

Back in 1967, not a single member of the House of the Representatives or the Senate voted against the referendum provisions.

In the same spirit - I hope that the Opposition and the crossbench will support the proposal, join the campaign for a Yes vote and bring their supporters to the cause.

We will seek-out every ally and every advocate from, to quote the Statement, 'every point under the southern sky'.

Fundamentally, this is a reform I believe every Australian can embrace, from all walks of life, in every part of the country, from every faith and background and tradition.

Because it speaks to values that we all share and honour – fairness, respect, decency.

Enshrining a Voice will be a national achievement. It will be above politics.

A unifying Australian moment.

There may well be misinformation and fear campaigns to counter.

But perhaps the greatest threat to the cause is indifference.

The notion that this is a nice piece of symbolism - but it will have no practical benefit.

Or that somehow advocating for a Voice comes at the expense of expanding economic opportunity, or improving community safety, or lifting education standards or helping people get the health care they deserve or find the housing they need.

Championing a Voice won't stop us from upgrading all-weather roads, so communities can get the supplies and services they need.

It won't delay our plan to train 500 new Aboriginal healthcare workers.

It won't stand in the way of our new investments in lifesaving kidney dialysis treatment.

Let us all understand this, very clearly: Australia does not have to choose between improving peoples' lives and amending the Constitution.

We can do both – and we have to.

Because 121 years of Commonwealth governments arrogantly believing they know enough to impose their own solutions on Aboriginal people have brought us to this point.

This torment of powerlessness.

- A life expectancy gap of 20 years.
- Some of the worst incarceration rates in the world.
- A broken system that burns billions of dollars and delivers precious little for the people who are supposed to be able to trust in it.

And if governments simply continue and insist they know better – then things will get worse.

Friends,

In my lifetime, there has been an extraordinary and joyous change in the way Australians from all walks of life have embraced the privilege we have to share this island continent with the world's oldest continuous culture.

We have cast aside the discriminatory fiction of *terra nullius* and offered a National Apology to the Stolen Generations.

We have said Sorry - and begun the task of making good.

States and territories are embarked on agreement-making, truth-telling, and the work of treaty.

First Nations people sit in our parliaments in record numbers and serve as Ministers.

Our environment benefits from the wisdom of people who have cared for it and thrived in it, through hundreds of generations.

The cult of forgetfulness, 'the Great Australian silence' that dishonored our history has been broken by a chorus of song and language and art and sport and celebration.

You haven't just witnessed that change – you've fought for it, you've championed it, you've been the spark and carried the fire to every corner of this vast country.

And I believe Australians – as fair-minded people, recognise that if we want to share in the riches of 60,000 years of history and tradition...

...then we also share in the responsibility for helping First Nations people build and own a better future.

Because we are all diminished, all of us, when First Nations people are denied their right to a happy and fulfilling life, denied the chance to play a full part in the life of our country.

We are all diminished. And we are all involved.

And soon – all of us – will have a chance to exercise our democratic right and our basic human responsibility to vote for something better.

To have a sense of ownership over the change that this country so desperately needs.

Friends,

A referendum is a high hurdle to clear, you know that and so do we.

We recognise the risks of failure - but we also recognise the risk of failing to try.

We see this referendum as a magnificent opportunity for Australia.

I am optimistic that this historic decision, this long-overdue embrace of truth and justice and decency and respect for First Nations people will be voted into law by the people of Australia.

The voice of the Australian people will create a Voice to Parliament.

All Australians have the chance to own this change, to be proud of it, to be counted and heard on the right side of history.

To vote the unique Australian gift of the wisdom of the world's oldest continuing civilisation into the Constitution of our nation, into our birth certificate.

My optimism for the success of this referendum derives from my optimistic view of the Australian character.

And I am hopeful, in years to come, when we gather here at Garma, we will be able to measure that success not just by the number of people who vote for a Voice...

...but by the lives that the Voice helps to change.

The communities it empowers, the opportunities it creates, the justice it delivers, the security it will bring to First Nations people around our country.

I am determined for us to succeed in this great project.

And – working together, with humility, with hope – I am absolutely sure we can.

PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA