

# Submission: The Voice

---

KM221213

## Summary

This submission addresses proposals for legislative changes affecting the methods used to inform the public on the proposed amendments to the Australian Constitution regarding The Voice.

The yes/no pamphlet should be retained and made available in electronic format at the APH website. The pamphlet should address issues raised in this and other submission.

The information provided by the Federal Government on the proposed amendments should be informative, transparent and balanced and producing and disseminating this information should be adequately funded by the Federal Government to ensure it is accessible by all Australians.

Any concurrent 'civic' campaign should be adequately regulated to minimise harm to individuals and expose any conflict of interest.

Historically, when Australian voters feel they have been inadequately informed or excessively pressured regarding an amendment to the Constitution, they tend to vote No. These recommendations will help ensure that Australian voters feel well-informed and confident to vote on the proposed Constitution amendments.

## Proposed legislative changes:

1. Abolish the official yes and no pamphlet;
2. Refuse to recognise an official yes and no campaign; and
3. Cancel public funding in favour of a so-called 'civic education' campaign.

## Discussion:

### **Abolish the official yes and no pamphlet**

Amending the Australian Constitution is a significant step. History tells us that proposed amendments to the Constitution do not pass unless they: a) have bipartisan support, and b) voters feel fully informed of what they are voting for. Abolishing the official yes/no pamphlet will undermine (b), i.e. voters will feel less informed of what they are voting for and will therefore tend to vote No.

As a voter, I will be seeking answers to the following questions:

- The proposed wording of the amendment
- What paid/salaried positions will the change create and how much will The Voice cost?
- Will the Voice be able to veto and amend legislation or will it be purely "advisory"?
- What will the Voice do that an "Aboriginal Advisory Office" under the current Constitution can't do?

- How, exactly, will the Voice improve outcomes for Aboriginal Australians? How will that be measured?
- What will be the long-term impacts? Constitutional amendments are not easily undone so this is not a 'try before you buy' scenario. Can we be certain there will be no unintended adverse effects to any Australians as a result of the amendments?

As the Federal government has direct access to the information required to answer these questions, it should take responsibility for providing a balanced and informative document on the proposed amendments.

### **Refuse to recognise an official yes and no campaign**

Just because the current Federal Government would like the amendments to pass doesn't absolve them of the responsibility of acknowledging alternative opinion and providing comprehensive and transparent information to the Australian voters. Australia is a democracy and better decisions are made when the decision-makers have balanced access to relevant information.

### **Cancelling public funding in favour of a so-called 'civic education' campaign**

Private interests are unlikely to have access to all the information that voters require to make an informed decision.

Private interests are likely to have strong views, one way or another, and aggressive marketing techniques are likely to be used that denigrate those with opposing views. This is likely to result in mental and possibly even physical harm to those speaking out on the topic.

The 'civic' campaign is unlikely to clearly state conflict of interest. For example, persons who think they may derive long-term employment from establishment of The Voice, are likely to heavily promote it at the risk of denigration and harm to fellow aboriginals that oppose it.

### **Recommendations:**

1. The yes/no pamphlet should be retained and made available in electronic format at the APH website. The pamphlet should address issues raised in this and other submissions.
2. The information provided by the Federal Government on the proposed amendments should be informative, transparent and balanced.
3. Producing and disseminating the informative, balanced and transparent information should be adequately funded by the Federal Government to ensure it is accessible by all Australians.
4. Any concurrent 'civic' campaign should be adequately regulated to minimise harm to individuals and expose any conflict of interest.