



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Dr Shumi Akhtar
Associate Professor
The University of Sydney

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CONSTITUTION ALTERATION (ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER VOICE) 2023

I, Shumi Akhtar (Associate Professor at the University of Sydney Business School), thank the Joint Select Committee on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice Referendum for inviting me to this critical submission. My submission addresses each of the terms of reference below:

a. protections against the potential for foreign actors to seek to influence the outcome or public debate on the referendum question;

It is widely known that literacy and numeracy among the Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders are relatively low. The possibility of foreign actors influencing this underprivileged community for their benefit remains high. I strongly advocate that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders should have a voice in the parliament to improve their needs, such as education, land and heritage protection, job opportunities, adequate medical and health care, and housing. Still, a monitoring mechanism or forming an independent committee should be in place to assist and oversee them so that they are not influenced by foreign actors directly or in disguise to take advantage of the Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders.



b. the detection, mitigation, and obstruction of potential dissemination of misinformation and disinformation, including via social media or technology platforms;

Social Media can be a friend or an enemy – depending on the knowledge/understanding one has on a given subject matter to detect/assess how someone is using this platform to brainwash a targeted audience. The Australian government should have a mechanism in the IT infrastructure to see damaging information shared in social media and take proactive actions to stop spreading misinformation and disinformation to its population. There is no limit to rumors and false and misleading information. The Australian people should be educated on how to process social media information. There should be a hotline to report untrue, damaging misinformation and disinformation. Also, an IT alert can be flagged next to any social media information if certain social media information is deemed to be a false and misleading corrupt motive behind it.

c. the potential application of the Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme to the referendum and its participants;

The Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme that commenced on 10 December 2018 is a good initiative, but how fruitful it has been needing more public sharing – such as Radio, Newspaper/ TV news, etc. We have to be mindful that not every Australians have access or the ability operating to sophisticated IT devices/tools/equipment. Also, senior citizen largely relies on TV, Radio, and hard copies of newspapers. This Scheme's participant profile should be subject to yearly review to ensure the participants are not subject to malpractice or corruption.

d. the potential application and administration of foreign donation laws to the referendum and its participants;

Australia once used to be known as a bribery/donation-free country. However, Australia's poor migration screening process and inadequate regular government official profile checking led to several corrupt and fraudulent activities among the government's high officials. In this referendum, the current government must ensure we have a proper mechanism to make bribery or donation a criminal offense. Any gift or donation, or bribery should be treated as unacceptable behavior.

e. the application of authorization requirements to the referendum and its participants;



A well-balanced participant should be considered for applying authorization to the referendum. Well-balanced means a well-educated population from a diverse background of culture, ancestry, and gender.

f. the ongoing integrity and assurance processes of the Australian Electoral Commission;

Australian Electoral system should consider the implication of this referendum if successful and revise its voting policies and candidates' eligibility accordingly to be transparent and fair. The integrity of voting and candidate selection should have the highest integrity. Some of the regional areas where it is rich in natural resources such as air, water, land, forestry, fisheries, agriculture, solar farms, and other precious metals, the political representatives that stand for those regional areas to be at the parliament for the upper or lower house should be filtered out with their profile's security check if found any suspicious activities they were involved in, including their family members. It is unacceptable when senators or politicians' history reveals highly questionable actions in society, the financial market, and the economy.

I thank the committee again for allowing me to engage in such a nationally important issue. I will happily welcome any opportunity to discuss further if required by the Joint Standing Committee during the public hearings. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Shumi

Dr. M. SHUMI AKHTAR | Associate Professor
The discipline of Finance | The University of Sydney Business School
THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY