

To the members of the Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition Relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples,

I am writing to you as the Chair of the Public Affairs Commission (PAC) of the Anglican Church of Australia (ACA). The PAC is a Commission appointed by the Standing Committee of General Synod.

The ACA in its General Synod meeting in 2017 passed a resolution in support of a constitutionally-entrenched First Nations' Voice. The General Synod is the national Anglican Church "parliament" made up of bishops and elected representatives, both clergy and lay, of Anglican dioceses around Australia (thus including a range of political and theological viewpoints). This meets about every 3 or 4 years. The text of the resolution is attached. There was no opposition expressed to this motion.

A similar resolution was passed by the Perth Anglican Synod. The Adelaide Anglican Synod met after the government had indicated that it was not in favour of a constitutionally recognised First Nations' Voice. It passed a motion expressing disappointment about that response. The text of these resolutions are also included in the attached document.

As you can see the ACA position is supportive of the Uluru Statement and the recommendations of the Referendum Council. Materials explaining the recommendations of the Referendum Council and an update on treaties, along with theological reflections and prayers are being prepared as requested by General Synod for distribution and use in Anglican parishes, schools and agencies throughout the country

There is nothing in the proposal for a First Nations' Voice that would amount to a third chamber of Parliament. The proposals have never been for the Voice to have a right of veto or to require its approval to pass any legislation. It is an opportunity for the Parliament to hear the voice of First Nations' people affected by its legislation. This is a small step towards applying some of the principles in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Furthermore, the proposal for a First Nations' Voice is a very modest one that may well have sufficient support of the public for a referendum if properly characterised by the government and other major political parties.

If there is concern about sufficient support to succeed at a referendum, the government could at least consider enacting such a First Nations' Voice by ordinary legislation and referring matters to it to enable the public to get accustomed such an institution first.

On any approach to these matters, the process needs to be one that involves First Nations' Peoples and any proposal must have significant First Nations' support. The Uluru Statement appears to have achieved this and should be supported as far as possible.

Previously the PAC had made submissions to the Expert Panel and subsequent committees investigating constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. There has always been consistent support from the PAC and ACA for substantive constitutional reforms that will be legally effective and not merely a symbolic form of recognition that will not make any real difference. For convenience we attach two of these earlier submissions. The March 2015 submission also contains the text of the earlier General Synod resolution from 2014.

Please feel free to get in touch with me if you have any further questions.
Yours faithfully,

Dr Carolyn Tan,
Chair of the Public Affairs Commission, Anglican Church of Australia

