

Dear Committee Secretariat,

My name is [REDACTED] and I live on Whadjuk Noongar Country.

I work in education and am deeply invested in the transformation of our government systems to be culturally responsive and culturally safe. I believe in the power of education to change hearts and minds, and our recent Referendum result demonstrates just what can happen when Australian's are not successful lifelong learners and active and informed members of the community.

For decades, First Nations Peoples in Australia have called for truth-telling processes to lay a foundation of truth about our shared history, and as a vehicle toward justice and greater self-determination for their communities.

I wholeheartedly support the Truth and Justice Commission Bill 2024 which would establish a national Truth and Justice Commission to inquire into and make recommendations to Parliament on particular matters relating to historic and ongoing injustices against First Peoples in Australia and the impacts of these injustices on First Peoples.

I support the Truth and Justice Commission because:

- The Albanese Government pledged to implement the Uluru Statement in full. The creation of a national Truth and Justice Commission would be an important step toward ensuring this commitment is not broken.
- Community-led truth-telling has been underway for many decades across the continent, often led by First Nations Peoples. A national Truth and Justice Commission backed by the Government would signal strong leadership and create greater awareness of these crucial community-led local truth processes, as well as support for state and territory-led truth processes.
- The Government has not adequately listened to and acted on previous landmark truth-telling processes. The establishment of a national Truth and Justice Commission must include a commitment to meaningful action that ensures First Nations communities can exercise their right to self-determination. It is beyond time for governments to relinquish control and to hand meaningful decision-making power back to First Nations communities, where it belongs.

Truth-telling is a shared and active process between everyday Australians in which First Nations Peoples and non-Indigenous Australians engage as equal partners. It calls on non-Indigenous Australians to go further than passively witnessing testimony of violation or trauma by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and to engage in a practice of truth-listening that creates substantive and transformative change.

Truth-telling is about collective accountability and honesty, so we don't make the same mistakes again. There have been several major truth-telling opportunities in our history, from the 1997 Bringing Them Home Report to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, that have not been adequately acted on by the Government. In light of this, a national truth-telling process

must be accompanied by structural change in the form of treaty-making, whereby First Nations communities can exercise their right to self-determination and make decisions that are best for their peoples, communities and futures. It is beyond time for governments to relinquish control and to hand meaningful decision-making power back to First Nations communities, where it belongs. A national Truth and Justice Commission must operate alongside and as part of treaty readiness, with the intention to engage in national-level agreement making that rebalances power relations – without structural change, a truth-telling process risks becoming performative.

The establishment of a national Truth and Justice Commission would also complement and support the many community-led truth telling processes that are underway at a local level, and encourage these place-based processes to be established in other communities. It has been well established that many First Nations Peoples believe that engaging in these local, community-led truth-telling processes with their non-Indigenous neighbours and community members will be a powerful and transformative process that can change how individuals see each other, and develop greater collective responsibility and social cohesion.

It is critical that a national Truth and Justice process be strengths-based. Truth-telling can be a powerful expression of First Nations identity and self-determination, and has the potential to counter stereotypes of First Nations communities as disempowered by highlighting their strengths and resistance. In this way, a national truth-telling process should centre and increase public awareness of First Nations culture, community and connection to Country so that these can play a more central role in contemporary Australia.

I thank the Committee for the opportunity to contribute to this Inquiry and sincerely hope the points I have raised will be considered.

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