
SUPPORT FOR CONSTITUTIONAL RECOGNITION THROUGH A VOICE

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission about the provisions of the Constitution Alteration Bill 2023 to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Constitution through a Voice.

I am committed to the Yes campaign in support of this Bill.

Constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders has been under consideration for many years. The coming referendum will give us all a rare historical opportunity to vote on a question that has been asked of us by the very people whom it affects most directly.

But recognition, by itself, is not enough. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, through the Uluru Statement from the Heart, have asked that the form of constitutional recognition be through a Voice so that recognition can be more practical and meaningful.

Clearly when those affected by any decision are genuinely consulted and their views and experiences are taken into account, outcomes achieved are significantly better. A Voice to Parliament and executive government, enshrined in the Constitution as proposed, will facilitate better decision-making at a national level on matters that directly affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and result in better outcomes and more efficient use of resources.

Hence I urge the committee to

1. support that the Constitution be the vehicle for a Voice at the national level, not only to respect the request from the Uluru Statement from the Heart, but so that it is not so easily altered through future changes of government;
2. consider favourably the views of most of those constitutional law experts (including former High Court judges) who have advised or provided input to the various considerations to date that the proposed wording of the amendment to Constitution is legally safe;
3. acknowledge the need for Voices to exist not just at local and regional levels, but also at a national level because it is at all three levels that decisions are made that directly affect our indigenous Australians; and
4. agree that a national Voice should be able to make representations not only to Parliament on relevant matters of legislation but also to Government ministers and the public service on policy and how laws and policy are implemented because it is not just laws at the national level that directly affect our indigenous Australians but how they come to be proposed and how they work 'on the ground'.

Finally, we must recognise that we cannot squander this rare opportunity to further the cause of First Nations Australians. To do so would be to set back by decades their road to reconciliation, justice and reasonable opportunity.

Thank you for considering my views on this important matter.

