

Respectful conversation in Australia – a First Nations Voice to Parliament

We encourage all members to be informed on the Voice from all perspectives and to respect all individuals and their positions in relation to the Voice.

The information below has been prepared by the FOHT Reconciliation Committee.

Uncle Lewis O'Brien, a significant Kurna Elder teaches that when non-Aboriginal people look at a proposition or a problem they immediately divide into camps with a Yes or No response.

The Kurna people were the teachers and knowledge keepers. They looked at the brain and called it muka muka because it appeared in two halves.

What that means for decision making in the Aboriginal community is that we should think both ways. In other words, look at a problem from all sides before resolving which direction to take.

When you look at Mount Lofty from Uraidla or from the Adelaide Plains, you see different perspectives, but it is obviously still the same mountain.

Australians are being asked "Do they support Aboriginal recognition and an Aboriginal Voice to Parliament?" at the Referendum on the Australian Constitution that will be held by December 2023.

A Referendum is the people's choice. We should hold respectful conversations as it is beholden upon us to get informed. And we need to look at this question in principle from all angles.

All perspectives are relevant; all questions are legitimate; all positions are respected.

Lidia Thorpe wants to make sure that the Voice doesn't cede sovereignty. Megan Davis, Professor Anne Twomey and George Williams, leading Constitutional lawyers in this country, all say that the Voice will not cede sovereignty, but it is important that Lidia is listened to in holding her position. She wants a treaty first and also should be respected for this stance. And a Treaty as an agreement between governments will require some form of representative body to negotiate with Government (as is currently being experienced in Victoria).

Jacinta Price wants alcohol use, domestic and family violence and crime in her community fixed; many of us want the same thing in seeing these things fixed as well. She doesn't want a huge bureaucracy; that too is something that most people will support.

Peter Dutton wants to strengthen regional Aboriginal voices; this is a sentiment that a number of us would support.

And all of these perspectives have alternate perspectives too.

This movement towards Constitutional Recognition is not new.

Eighty five years ago, William Cooper stood on the steps of Parliament in Victoria at the first Day of Mourning and asked the Government to listen to Aboriginal people and recognise their rights in Australia.

The 1967 Referendum with a 91% Yes vote resolved to count Aboriginal people in the census for the first time. It was a campaign that supported Aboriginal rights.

Yet, at the same time, up to that time, Aboriginal people had been named in the Australian Constitution solely by exception. The race powers that enabled the Australian Government to make laws on the basis of race previously read, ".....except for Aboriginal people....." as it was the States that made laws for Aboriginal people. Those words were removed and since then the Constitution has remained totally silent upon Aboriginal people; not a single mention.

They are our first peoples who have over 60,000 years of continuous living culture in this land and our Birth Certificate says nothing about this!

In 2000, the Reconciliation movement took off and has grown ever since with Bridge Walks, Indigenous Rounds, Reconciliation Action Plans and school education materials.

Ten years ago, in 2013, the Recognise Campaign came through South Australia. People walked from Bordertown to Adelaide and then drove in convoy to Alice Springs as part of the Journey to Recognition.

Recognise was a very slick promotional campaign with excellent political marketing. But something was missing. The message started to get through that Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander peoples hadn't had a chance to state what they wanted in terms of recognition.

In 2015, Tony Abbott, as the Liberal Prime Minister, met with 40 Aboriginal leaders at Kirribili House and Bill Shorten, the Opposition leader, joined him. It was resolved in a bi-partisan way to establish a Referendum Council that would consult with Aboriginal people as to their views on recognition.

The Referendum Council held twelve Regional dialogues right across the country. From these, delegates were appointed to go to Uluru. Six years ago the Uluru Statement from the Heart was developed as a result of the meeting at Uluru.

243 people at Uluru agreed by consensus that not only did they want Constitutional Recognition, they wanted something more substantive by having a Voice to Parliament.

This remarkable statement which is full of grace and meaning is clear. And we are invited to join the people's movement across the country to unite for change.

"In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard. We leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country. We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future".

The link to the Uluru Statement from the Heart is: -

https://www.referendumcouncil.org.au/sites/default/files/2017-05/Uluru_Statement_From_The_Heart_0.PDF

All detail regarding the Voice has been prepared in comprehensive reports presented to the Morrison Liberal Government. And all of the detail will be voted upon by politicians if the "in principle" question is supported at the Referendum.

Pat Anderson was the Co-Chair of the Referendum Council and she is now Co-Chair of the Uluru Dialogues Group. On the 14th of October, "When you go into the polling booth, it is just you and your conscience and you have to make a decision... There is real opportunity for Australia to look at itself and assess who we are."