



Australian Senate Occasional Lecture Series

50th Anniversary of the 1967 referendum

Friday 26 May 2017, 12.15pm to 1.15pm • Theatre, Parliament House



Russell Taylor AM

Indigenous Constitutional Recognition - 1967 Referendum and Today

➔ Russell Taylor AM

The referendum held on 27 May 1967 posed two questions—the first, known as the ‘nexus question’, concerned the balance of numbers between the Senate and the House of Representatives, while the second, which is the focus of Mr Taylor’s lecture, was to determine whether two references in the Australian Constitution that discriminated against Aboriginal people should be removed. Changes to these clauses allowed for Aboriginal people to be included in the census and altered the ‘race power’ to allow federal parliament to make ‘special laws’ about Aboriginal people. On this second question the referendum was spectacularly successful: returning the highest yes vote ever recorded in a federal referendum with an unprecedented 90.77 per cent voting for change.

Mr Taylor’s lecture will include a short commentary on the history of campaigns for constitutional reform on Aboriginal issues leading up to 1967; a personal perspective on the immediate and longer term impact of the successful referendum; and finally a discussion of the challenges associated with Indigenous constitutional recognition currently facing the nation.

Mr Taylor is an Aboriginal Australian with extensive experience as an executive in the Australian Public Service. He recently completed an eight-year period as Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, during which time he was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia.

The Nexus Question

The ‘nexus question’ was the other proposal Australians were asked to consider at the 1967 Referendum. In order to jog the collective memory, Mr Denis Strangman AM was commissioned to write a paper examining this often overlooked part of the 1967 Referendum. Mr Strangman was on the staff of Senator Vince Gair, Parliamentary Leader of the Australian Democratic Labour Party and a strong advocate of a no vote on this question. Mr Strangman’s paper will be available at the lecture and, later, online.

Admission free – bookings not required. Can't make the lecture? Watch it live at www.aph.gov.au/Senate/Lectures
Enquiries: Senate Procedure Office, telephone **02 6277 3074** or email research.sen@aph.gov.au