

## **Statement on behalf of former Australian Human Rights Commissioners**

An Indigenous Voice to Parliament would be a powerful way of upholding human rights in Australia.

The current Human Rights Commissioner, Lorraine Finlay, has said that the Voice to Parliament would ‘insert race into the Australian Constitution in a way that undermines the foundational human rights principles of equality and non-discrimination’.

We unanimously disagree. Not only is the proposed Voice to Parliament consistent with international human rights law, the Voice would improve the protection of human rights in Australia. Recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia’s Constitution, and giving Indigenous people an effective say on issues that affect them, are ways of demonstrating Australia’s commitment to equality and the fair go.

Each of the signatories to this statement has previously served as Australia’s Human Rights Commissioner. We respect that incumbent Human Rights Commissioners should have the opportunity to fulfil their responsibilities as they decide, provided it accords with international human rights law. We make this statement because Ms Finlay has made a serious error in stating that the proposed Voice to Parliament would somehow undermine human rights or the Constitution itself.

We unanimously take a different view regarding Australian and international law. Commissioner Finlay’s view is likely to mislead Australians who will be required to vote on this proposal at a referendum. Ms Finlay’s position is contrary to the position of the Australian Human Rights Commission itself, and of her colleague, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, June Oscar AO – a proud Bunuba woman from Western Australia.

Brian Burdekin AO (Human Rights Commissioner 1986-1994)

Chris Sidoti (Human Rights Commissioner 1995-2000)

Graeme Innes AM (Human Rights Commissioner 2005-2009)

The Hon Catherine Branson AC KC (Human Rights Commissioner 2009-2012)

Edward Santow (Human Rights Commissioner 2016-2021)