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A submission relating to the Uluru Statement from the heart.

The Uluru Statement is an appeal to the parliament and the people of Australia to walk with our Indigenous peoples to a better future. It is not a walk where one walks in front of the other with all the answers, but a walk of equals with deep respect for each other. I would therefore recommend that:

Seeking a Makarrata Commission would be a first step:

1. It would supervise a process of agreement making between the government and first Nations and be funded from the federal budget.
2. It would initiate, encourage, and provide resources for truth-telling about our history.
3. Such truth-telling would change the emphasis from Australia's 'peaceful history' to one that acknowledges the frontier wars and the massacres. It is this truth in particular that Indigenous peoples want told.
4. Such truth-telling, where appropriate, would lead to erecting Memorial Plaques that acknowledged local massacres. A good example can be seen at Port Fairy in Victoria, next to the Tourist Information Centre.
5. Such truth-telling could occur by Local Governments inviting its citizens to meet with local Indigenous people in small groups and listen to their stories.
6. Such truth-telling could also lead to an acknowledgement that the Australian flag as is, is no longer an adequate expression of the nation's history.
7. A competition for a new national flag design would incorporate Indigenous peoples' symbols.
8. The Commission would urge the Federal Government to put greater pressure on the British Government and various museums to return the remains of Indigenous peoples and significant artefacts.
9. The Commission would encourage Local Governments that have James Cook statues on their lands, to add to the writing on these statues, explaining why the original inscriptions are no longer the full truth. Such sites can become sites of learning and reflection.

Constitutional Change

I recommend a Preamble such as exists in the Constitution of the Uniting Church in Australia, arrived at after many years of consultation in 1997. Such a preamble would not mention the Christian religion but be a secular version. The following suggests what it could be like.

A Preamble to the Australian Constitution.

Believing that our nation seeks renewal of its life as a community of First and Second Peoples from many lands, we recognize that:

- When the process of colonisation began in 1788, the early settlers entered a land that had been occupied for some forty to sixty thousand years
- This land had nurtured and sustained the First Peoples, the Aboriginal and Islander Peoples, who continue to understand themselves to be traditional owners and custodians of these lands and waters since time immemorial

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- Some early settlers and government officials approached the first Peoples with good intentions, standing with them in the name of justice; considering their well-being, culture and language.
- Many, however, shared the values and relationships of the emerging colonial society including paternalism and racism towards the First peoples. They were complicit in the injustice that resulted in many of the First Peoples being dispossessed from their land, their language, their culture and spirituality.
- The dominant culture of Australia constructed and propagated a distorted version of history that denied this land was occupied, utilised, cultivated and harvested by these First Peoples who also had complex systems of trade and interrelationships.
- From the beginning of colonisation the First Peoples challenged their dispossession and the denial of their proper place in this land. In time this was taken up in the community, in the courts, in the parliaments, in the way history was recorded and told.
- In 1967 the First Peoples were acknowledged in their right to vote; in 1988 the Barunga Statement laid down the challenges for governments to properly acknowledge the rights of the First Peoples; in 1992 the Mabo case overturned the doctrine of terra nullius; in 2017 the Uluru Statement from the heart renewed the call for First and second Peoples to work together for a better future for all.