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Committee Secretary

Joint Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

PO Box 6021

Parliament House

Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretariat,

Re: Inquiry into the Truth and Justice Commission Bill

I am a 67 year old retired general practitioner. I had a special interest in mental health and worked as a medical psychotherapist which required a trauma-informed approach. I understand and have experience dealing with the far-reaching consequences of intergenerational trauma.

I obtained my undergraduate medical degree in South Africa and chose to leave the country due to its extreme racism and the political system of apartheid. I was very grateful to be able to make Australia my new home nearly four decades ago. However, it didn't take me long to be shocked to witness the extent of prejudice and inequalities in this country. I thought I was leaving behind inferior healthcare for indigenous people, reflected in the higher incidence of preventable infectious diseases, prevalence of malnutrition, reduced life expectancy, and a higher neonatal death rate. My reaction was one of disappointment and disbelief. I find it shocking that so many residents in Australia are still living under third world conditions. Unfortunately during my time in this country, there has been vastly inadequate change in this regard.

Australia could learn from South Africa's process of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We cannot change the past, but we can learn from it and assist those who have been harmed by our attitudes and actions in response to it. The only way to change Australia's history into the future is to actually change it in the now. For

too long there has been inaction and division. I believe there are too many ill-informed Australians, and that racist attitudes could be lessened and human compassion enhanced with simple education of the facts. All Australians need the truth.

I was a strong proponent of the “Yes” campaign last year and felt very disillusioned at the result of the referendum. I welcome the opportunity to make this submission. I wish to wholeheartedly voice my support for the Truth and Justice Commission Bill 2024. We all need truth-telling and truth-listening. I believe Australia as a country and the lives of all Australians could be enhanced by this process. I live in hope and look forward to the establishment of the Commission and its recommendations to Parliament.

Yours sincerely

Cathy Fraser