

We welcome the opportunity to provide a submission to the Joint Select Committee on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice Referendum on the *Constitution Alteration (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice) 2023 Bill (Bill)*.

We acknowledge the years of work by many Indigenous and non-Indigenous people that have led to this moment. This is the ninth government-endorsed process to examine the issue of the constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in just over a decade.

In 2023, it is time our nation achieves meaningful Indigenous constitutional recognition.

There should be one final process by the end of this year – a successful referendum to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of Australia in the Australian Constitution through a Voice.

We support the Bill introduced to the Parliament on 30 March 2023 and its proposed change to the Constitution:

Chapter IX—Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

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In recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of Australia:

- (i) There shall be a body, to be called the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice;
- (ii) The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice may make representations to the Parliament and the Executive Government of the Commonwealth on matters relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
- (iii) The Parliament shall, subject to this Constitution, have power to make laws with respect to matters relating to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice, including its composition, functions, powers and procedures.

The proposal in this Bill to constitutionally recognise Indigenous Australians through a Voice is a modest request and a good deal for our nation.

There are four reasons we believe the Australian people agree will deliver a ‘Yes’ vote if asked to support the proposed change to the Constitution:

1. We have over 65,000 years of continuous Indigenous culture, and **it’s time** our now 122 years old constitution was updated to recognise the people that were here first;
2. We should make this change because legal experts including former High Court judges have confirmed that a Voice to Parliament is a **legally safe** way to constitutionally recognise Indigenous Australians;
3. We should make this change because about **80% of Indigenous Australians support** constitutional recognition in the form of a Voice to Parliament, and
4. Constitutional recognition through a Voice is a **simple proposal** whose time has come. Let’s get on with it.

It is important to also reflect on the areas of agreement across the Parliament on the elements of the proposed change to the Constitution:

- The status quo for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with respect to life expectancy and quality of life is not good enough.
- As a nation, we cannot continue with the same policies and laws to address these issues and expect a different result – we need to do something different.
- No party or government has consistently and effectively provided solutions for the challenges facing Indigenous people.
- Indigenous people are best placed to understand their own challenges and the solutions that actually work on the ground.
- Both the Labor and Liberal parties have shared a bi-partisan commitment to recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Constitution since 2007 and that bi-partisanship remains today.
- There is cross-Parliamentary commitment on the need for an Indigenous Voice and for practical change on the ground.

Given this, the provisions of the Bill to change the Constitution are the only proposal that can achieve:

1. Meaningful symbolic recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of Australia in the Australian Constitution;
2. Practical recognition through a Voice, and
3. The recognition that Indigenous people have long sought, in the form they have requested.

Ultimately and rightfully, it is the Australian people that will ensure the referendum succeeds. We are confident they are ready to endorse this proposal.

We are pleased to make our submission to the Joint Select Committee on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice Referendum on the *Constitution Alteration (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice) 2023 Bill*.

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