

To the Joint Select Committee on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice Referendum,

Constitutional recognition of First Nations peoples in Australia.

My name is John Chadderton. I am descended from British soldiers and convicts who arrived on these lands now known as Australia in 1824 and 1831 respectively. Both ancestors lived in Tasmania and their numerous descendants included senior bureaucrats in the colonial government. Although I completed schooling and tertiary education in Tasmania, I grew up in complete ignorance that the land belonged for over 65,000 years to First Nations peoples and their descendants and that the British colonists stole this land and decimated the First Nations peoples. Having learned the facts of this history in recent years, on reflection, it became clear to me that in order to move our country forward together we must acknowledge and address the historical and continuing injustices toward First Nations peoples. It is critical that Australia's constitution be updated to recognise First Nations peoples as the First Peoples of this land. The invitation First Nations peoples have gifted to all Australians through the Uluru Statement from the Heart is a generous offer in the spirit of reconciliation and I fully support their call for a Voice, Treaty and Truth. In relation to the proposed referendum question and the wording of the constitutional amendment, I am fully supportive. In particular, I would like to highlight my support for the Voice having capacity to address both the Parliament and the Executive Government. This is essential to achieve effective change across those areas where First Nations peoples continue to experience injustice and disadvantage. First Nations peoples are fully entitled to sit at the primary seat of government i.e., federal, not just local and regional seats. I believe the proposed changes have substantial support amongst senior legal professionals, constitutional lawyers and, most importantly, First Nations peoples.

Recommendation:

Listening to the 'debate' about the referendum it is apparent that concerns among some First Nations peoples about the potential loss of First Nations sovereignty continue to undermine their confidence in the call for a Voice. This may also be true for non-First Nations people about the Crown sovereignty. The Uluru Statement from the Heart explains that First Nations sovereignty co-exists with sovereignty of the Crown. The notion of 'co-existent sovereignties' is neither familiar nor clear to many people and needs further explanation, through education and/or wording in the Constitution, by your government to reassure both First Nations peoples and all Australians that neither sovereignties are or can be diminished by the implementation of the Voice.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission and I look forward to the constitutional recognition of First Nations peoples through the Voice.

Yours sincerely,

John Chadderton  
Footscray, Victoria