



Voice Partnership Empowerment explained

A perspective from Indigenous people who have been driving on the ground efforts to improve outcomes for families and communities across urban, regional, and remote Australian regions.

Acknowledgement of Country

As Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands, winds, and waters we all call home, we acknowledge Australia's First People and welcome all to walk with us to a better future.

We pay respects to our Elders past, present and future.

Through them, our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wisdom and knowledge will continue to enrich the life of this country.

Thank you for listening to our Voices and our invitation to carry forward in a permanent partnership Australia's ancient foundations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, stories and understandings.

For this is how we will bind all Australians to each other and to this land, our shared home, for all future generations.

This is an historic year.

The Australian people will decide on recognition of Indigenous people in the nation's Constitution at the 2023 referendum.

The proposition of constitutional recognition through Voice is the brainchild of First Nations people. Research shows it is supported by 80% of our people across the country.

A successful referendum will be a great unifying moment in Australian history.



Referendum Reconciliation Recognition

What

‘What’ are you being asked to support at the referendum?

→ Constitutional recognition of our First Peoples.

To say yes to the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the First Peoples of Australia by giving them a Voice in their own affairs. That is the “what” of this referendum.

Why

‘Why’ do we need to recognise the first Australians in the Constitution?

→ Because we are still a nation that does not recognise its Indigenous people in its founding legal document – our national birth certificate.

The new Australia has never recognised the old Australia and its 65,000 years of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life. Yet recognition is foundational to reconciliation.



We have fought for our country alongside each other at war, but First Australians are not recognised in the Australian Constitution.

We have now had eight successive Prime Ministers who have wanted Australia to achieve constitutional recognition. Many Australians from all walks of life also agree, the status quo cannot continue. A new partnership with Indigenous people is needed so all Australians can move forward together, with confidence, into the future.

How

‘How’ will we recognise the First Peoples?

→ By requiring parliament to establish a Voice in our own affairs.

A Voice is how Indigenous people have proposed constitutional recognition can be achieved, after much consideration of all the options over a long period.

A Voice is also how we will – with much hard work and determination – overcome the difficult problems our families and communities face. A new empowering partnership is needed – one in which Indigenous voices from the ground are heard – so we can do things differently and close the gap.



A golden opportunity for a new partnership

The success of the partnership we can build together in the future is limited only by our own imaginations.

*Although **less than 3%** of the population, and often excluded, Indigenous Australians have already contributed much to who we are as Australians, and our full potential is yet to be realised.*

We've gifted our arts and culture, just as you have gifted us yours. We've fought in the wars alongside each other. Through Cathy Freeman, we lit the Olympic flame and delivered gold. Our legendary tennis and footy players show what's possible when we honour the dignity of Indigenous people through inclusion.

There is something of our sense of humour in the beloved Aussie larrikin. And our wonderful languages are already more familiar to you than you realise, through sayings like 'hard yakka', 'it's bung' and 'cooee'. And through words we use to describe our iconic animals and places, like Kangaroo, Kookaburra and Koala, and Canberra, Wonthaggi, and Woolloomooloo.

Constitutional recognition through Voice is about creating a permanent partnership in the Constitution.

This will ensure First Nations people can be listened to for generations to come, so our voices are included as a fundamental and positive part of the national story.

The Australian Constitution

The Constitution of 1901 is Australia's highest legal rule book. It is the founding law which created the federal government, the courts, and the Australian nation.

The Constitution contains the basic legal and political rules for how Australia is governed.

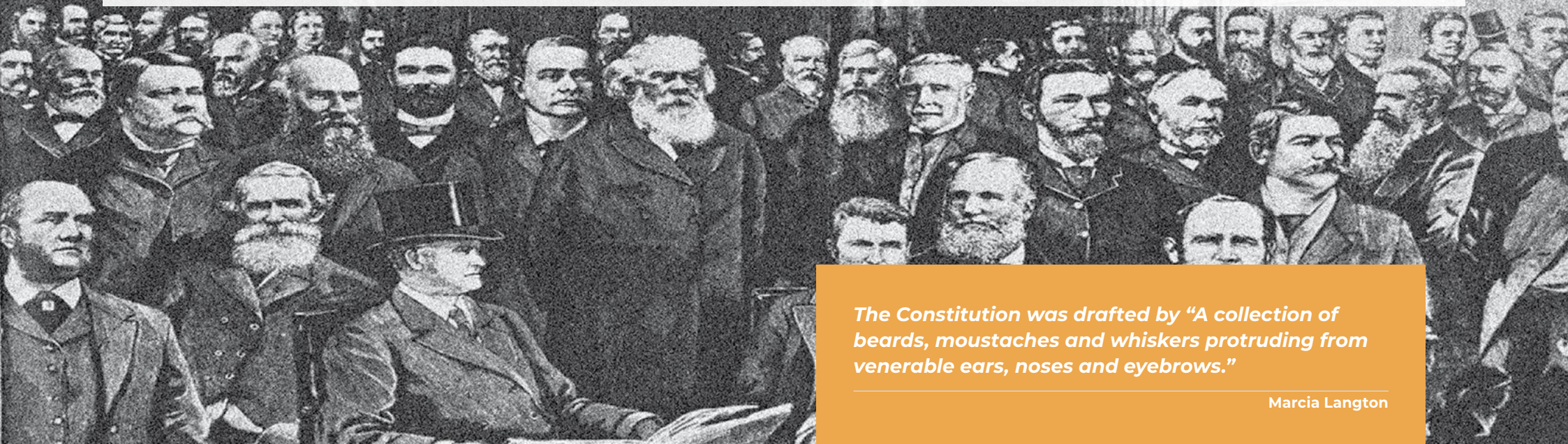
The first Australians did not get a say originally in the Constitution,

and it contained clauses that excluded us. It continues to have provisions based on outdated thinking about 'race'.

It is time the Constitution was updated to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Constitutional change can only be done by the Australian people at a referendum, not by politicians in the Parliament.

The Constitution can only be changed by 'double majority' approval at a referendum. This means a majority of voters in at least four states, and a majority of voters nationally, must vote 'yes' in favour of the change.



The Constitution was drafted by "A collection of beards, moustaches and whiskers protruding from venerable ears, noses and eyebrows."

Marcia Langton

Easter Saturday 1891 our nation's Founding Fathers came together from across the six colonies to draw up the Constitution on the paddle steamer, Lucinda, anchored at Pittwater, Sydney. The Constitutional Committee was hosted by Sir Samuel Griffith, Premier of Queensland and later first Chief Justice of the High Court. Edmund Barton, later the nation's first Prime Minister, was there. As was Charles Kingston, future Premier of South Australia, and Sir John Downer.

The long journey to constitutional recognition

Constitutional recognition will bridge 65,000 years of Indigenous life, unique heritage, cultures, and languages, with the more recent 235 plus years of contemporary Australia.

Recognition of Indigenous Australians did not come with the Endeavour, or with the First Fleet on 26 January 1788. It did not come in 1901 when the Constitution was enacted, or after the 1967 referendum when we were counted.

Every Prime Minister since John Howard—eight of them—have supported the need for recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Australian Constitution. Most Australians have been supportive too over a long period.

Thinking that Aborigines were innately inferior and sub-human was a strong idea here for almost one and a half centuries. We've come a long way since then. The referendum on constitutional recognition can take us further down the path of a better future together.

There has been much work done over a lengthy period to decide how best to resolve the fundamental issue of constitutional recognition.

Constitutional recognition through Voice is the solution proposed by Indigenous people after many public policy processes, including extensive Indigenous dialogues held across the country.

Guaranteeing our Voice so we can have a say in the matters affecting us is a practical way forward, so we can play an active role in solving the serious challenges many of our families and communities face.

It's time for action.



There has been longstanding bipartisan commitment to achieving constitutional recognition.

The last 35 years of the **Recognition** Journey

1988

- Yolŋu present **Barunga Statement** to Prime Minister Bob Hawke, declaring the aspirations of the Indigenous owners and occupiers of Australia, and requesting the Australian Government and people 'recognise' our rights.

2000

- Dr Evelyn Scott leads the People's walk for Reconciliation across the Sydney Harbour Bridge as part of Corroboree 2000.
- In her role on the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, **Dr Scott puts constitutional recognition on the agenda** through advocacy and reports to government.

2001

- A century after federation and the enactment of the Constitution in 1901, Prime Minister John Howard does not yet support constitutional recognition.

2007

- **Prime Minister John Howard announces support for constitutional recognition** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people. Opposition Leader Kevin Rudd also supports constitutional recognition.

2008

- Prime Minister Kevin Rudd delivers Apology, but no constitutional recognition in either first or second term.

2010

- Prime Minister Julia Gillard appoints an Expert Panel to lead the constitutional recognition agenda.

2011

- The report of the Expert Panel is met with strong opposition to the key idea of amending the Constitution to outlaw discrimination.

2012-13

- Things are at a stalemate. The constitutional recognition agenda stalls.

2014

- Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples established, Chaired by Mr Ken Wyatt MP, Liberal Party and Senator Nova Peris, Australian Labor Party. Conducts public hearings, consultations with constitutional law experts and community forums.

2015

- Mr Wyatt MP and Senator Peris present Joint Select Committee report. No action taken.
- Empowered Communities Design Report identifies need for Indigenous body to be guaranteed by the Constitution as part of a package of reforms to effect Indigenous recognition.

2016

- Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull establishes Referendum Council to advise the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition on options for constitutional recognition.
- **Referendum Council supports 12 Indigenous dialogues across the country** for Indigenous people to consider options for constitutional recognition.

2017

- **Indigenous Australians present a way forward in the Uluru Statement from the Heart, asking for 1. Voice, 2. Treaty, and 3. Truth.**
- Final Report of the Referendum Council. No action taken.

2018

- Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples established, Chaired by Senator Patrick Dodson, Australian Labor Party and Julian Leeser MP, Liberal Party.
- Senator Dodson and Mr Lesser MP present Joint Select Committee report.

2020

- Prime Minister Scott Morrison commissions Indigenous Voice Co-design Process Chaired by Professors Tom Calma and Marcia Langton. Co-Design draws on participation of more than 9400 Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and organisations.

2021

- Professors Langton and Calma present final Co-design report.

2022

- **Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announces 2023 referendum** and proposes constitutional amendment to recognise Indigenous Australians through Voice.
- Constitutional Expert Group involving Indigenous and other lawyers established to report further on the proposed constitutional amendment. Working Group and Engagement Group of Indigenous Australians established.

2023

- The question of constitutional recognition of Indigenous Australians will be put to the Australian people after being one of the most inquired about, researched, consulted and written about public policy questions in Australia's history.

Yunupingu 1948-2023

A tribute to the remarkable contribution, leadership, strength, and wisdom of Yunupingu, a giant of Indigenous rights throughout his lifetime.

Yunupingu's Gumatj clan is bound together with the lives of the 13 great clans of the Gove Peninsula in North East Arnhem Land.

These clans travel the song cycles that guide life and give people their meaning, seeking *yothu yindi*. This is Balance. Wholeness. Completeness.

As Yunupingu explained it is where: "No one is better than anyone else, everyone is equal, performing their role and taking their duties and responsibilities – then the ceremony is balanced and the clan moves in unison."

Just as these great clans are bound to each other for all time, so too are all of us who call Australia home. Together we must secure a future for Australia in which we can find harmony and balance. Yunupingu called this "the most serious business" we face as a nation.

He worked with 10 Prime Ministers on the struggle for recognition. He lived the many disappointments and broken promises of 'big talkers'. The 1988 Barunga Statement still hangs in Parliament. It is a foundational document and starting point for this current discussion. "This is about building our own lives, our own communities."



In 1988 Yunupingu presented the Barunga Statement to Prime Minister Bob Hawke in Barunga, calling for recognition. Again in 2008 as leader of the Gumatj clan he presented the then Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, with a petition asking for Yolngu to be recognised in the Constitution.

"I am fire" he said "and that fire must burn until there is nothing left."

Yunupingu had been crystal clear. We need to obtain balance in a new settlement. He had asked, "Do we want dignity, or do we want conflict for our future generations?"

He reminded us: the future is our responsibility, let's make it one where all Australians can say: "This is our country. It is a country that we are all proud of. We now rejoice and celebrate with our Indigenous brothers and sisters together as one."



Uluru Statement from the Heart

Indigenous people proposed constitutional recognition through Voice in the Uluru Statement from the Heart after:

- The country's most proportionately significant consultation process of First Nations peoples took place.
- More than 1200 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, from all points of the southern sky, participated in 12 regional dialogues across the country to consider all the options.
- A final 2017 National Constitutional Convention at Uluru, where 97% of the 250 delegates endorsed constitutional recognition through Voice so we can have a say in decisions made about us.

The Uluru Statement is an act of faith, hope and love. Faith in the Australian people. Hope for the future. Love for the country.

Constitutional recognition of Indigenous peoples worldwide

Many countries recognise their indigenous peoples in their constitutional systems and give them a voice in their affairs.

Australia does not.

Finland, Sweden and Norway each constitutionally recognise Sami rights, and give Sami a voice in their affairs through representative bodies.

The United States Constitution recognises indigenous people and the 'domestic dependant sovereignty' of Indian tribes has long been recognised. The State of Maine has had reserved (non-voting) legislative seats for tribal representatives since 1802, and since 1995 those representatives can instigate legislation. The National Congress of American Indians has operated as a "voice for tribal interests in Washington DC" since 1944.

Canada recognises indigenous rights in their constitution and also has a national Assembly of First Nations. Even the United Kingdom constitution recognises distinct peoples within its territory.

New Zealand's democracy is founded in the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi and has included reserved Māori parliamentary seats since 1867. Since 1962, the New Zealand Māori Council, a representative and advisory body, can 'make representations' to government on Māori policy.

Indigenous Australians have made a reasonable ask — for constitutional recognition through a guaranteed advisory body, so our voices can be heard in decisions that affect our lives and futures.



How the Voice would work

Advisory role

The power of the Voice will be in the new partnership that gives Indigenous people an official say in decisions made about them. Its advice would be non binding and sit outside of parliament. It would have no veto.

A Voice means Indigenous people will have a seat at the table so we can influence our lives and futures.

Matters the Voice would advise on

The Voice would advise on matters directly relating to the cultural, social and economic wellbeing of Indigenous peoples.

The Voice would naturally focus on the matters most relevant to Indigenous people and Closing the Gap. This would include policies and laws that have significant or distinctive impact on Indigenous peoples in areas where outcomes must improve, for example:

- education, employment, and economic development
- overcoming addiction and drug and alcohol abuse
- physical and mental health
- safety, crime prevention and reducing Indigenous incarceration
- suicide prevention
- language and cultural maintenance and revival.

All Indigenous residents and citizens should be able to have a say on their lives and futures, and be able to participate in the social and economic development of the communities they live in.

A Voice for Real Jobs

Too many Indigenous Australians are still being left behind and remain without all the crucial opportunities enabled by a job. Overcoming widespread joblessness is essential. Indigenous joblessness should not be considered inevitable, or acceptable.

To prosper, Indigenous Australians need real work opportunities, rather than being excluded and confined to performing 'work-like' for the dole activities or participating in endless training and skills building, without any realistic prospect of a real job. Development of real jobs must be guided by local Indigenous people who understand the needs and opportunities of our diverse regions best.

The vision for the future is one in which Indigenous Australians are working in real jobs but remain distinctly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and retain their culture, languages and connection with ancestral lands.

The Coalition Government commissioned the **Indigenous Voice Co-design Report** that drew on input from more than 9400 Indigenous, non-Indigenous people and organisations.



Empowered Communities has tried and tested **shared decision making**

Since 2015 Empowered Communities regions have been working with the Australian Government on changing the way it does business with Indigenous communities and regions to make better decisions in partnership on local policies, services and investment.

Empowered Communities will undergo change and transition when the Voice is established. But empowering reforms have been co-designed, tried and tested over the past seven years and provide 'proof of concept' examples to inform the new Voice partnership. These are practical examples of what can be scaled for all Indigenous places and people to improve outcomes when we have constitutional recognition through Voice.

For example, in our regions, Joint Decision-Making about funding of services and programs has helped to reduce waste and duplication, and meet local needs.



"We have developed a place-based partnership, but it's got to be done in a way that there's a long-term development approach like what we call the development agenda. We don't want to go back to crisis mode, we want to build our people up, rather than just throwing money at stuff that's not needed in the community."

Chris Ingrey, LaPerouse

Under Joint Decision-Making, panels of local people work with government to inform the funding decisions made by government, rather than decisions being made just by government people in Canberra who don't understand our communities, the gaps, and opportunities needed.

More than \$147 million dollars' worth of funding flowing into our regions has been considered through Joint Decision-Making and this has led to more productive use of resources.

Joint Decision-Making has been more effective at making tough decisions to cease funding and to redirect it to local priorities, than is the case when government tries to make these decisions alone without local input.

With greater government commitment to structural change, partnership approaches like these can help to make real change in our communities.



"Empowered Communities has provided models for us to proof up, showing how a Voice might work to improve decisions and outcomes in partnership with governments."

Tyrone Garstone, Kimberley

Changing the game

The status quo is not working. All Australian governments recognise they cannot continue top-down, government-led approaches, which have failed.

The Voice will create an official system of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation across our federal institutional architecture, so governments can work with us in partnership, to achieve development goals.

It will link Indigenous agency and action on the ground, to the state and national policy levels—through dialogue. **The National Voice will provide a conduit for our local voices to be heard, so more decisions can be made that are not one size fits all and are consistent with our on the ground development priorities and plans.**

A Voice will not provide a veto, but **Indigenous people will have a seat at the table**, so decisions and outcomes improve through our input.



Our local voices, including Elders, elected, cultural, youth and family leaders:

- plan our local priorities
- are empowered through Voice to partner with governments to drive change on ground, e.g., will reduce duplication and waste by ensuring \$ better directed to meet community needs.

All levels of government work together on local priorities.
Data and outcomes measured and available.

Empowering our local voices

Change must happen on the ground. It is our local communities that must be empowered to take up responsibility with governments for deciding what works best for their families and context.

Each Voice region will organise so our local voices can be brought into partnership with government. Indigenous devised principles agreed by the Australian Government require:

- Voice representatives will be chosen by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people based on the wishes of local communities.
- The Voice will be representative of Indigenous communities, with a gender balance and youth.
- The Voice will be empowering, community-led, inclusive, respectful, and culturally informed.

The Voice will mean responsibility for Closing the Gap will be shared between governments and Indigenous people on the ground for the first time. Every region will be held accountable for improving its results over time.

National Voice members will be Ambassadors or spokespersons, not politicians. It will be their role to bring our independent local voices and agendas to influence high level policy decisions of government, so approaches are better suited to the on-the-ground realities of our diverse communities and regions.

We want people who have consistently contributed to the hard work on the ground to be eligible for regional nomination and selection from our local voices right up to the National Voice.

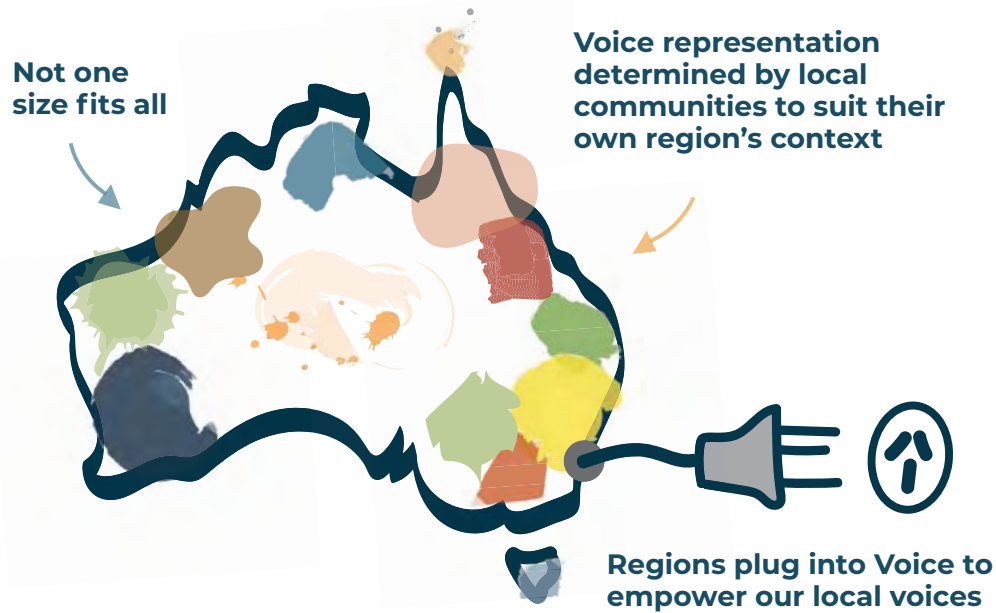
Voice in two parts

A Voice in two parts is proposed and desired by Indigenous people—that is, a Voice to link our local voices across Voice regions, to the state and national levels for the first time, to improve outcomes.

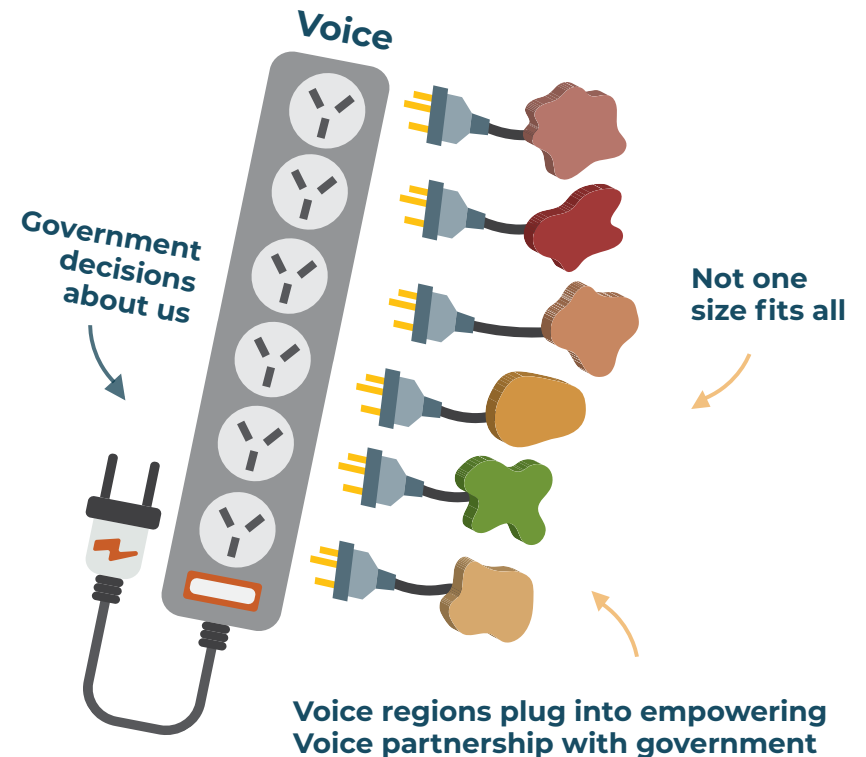
Across all Voice regions, it is the messages of our local voices that must be heard by governments right up to the National Voice which will advise on national legislation and headline policy.

The Voice will be a conduit so governments can access the experience and understanding of our local voices across our diverse regions, to improve decisions and outcomes.

Responsibility for Closing the Gap will be shared and negotiations at every level can be conducted with legitimacy and authority derived from families and communities on the ground.



Voice representation connects our local voices and agendas so each region can partner to influence government decision making.



Empower our Local Voices

Local people must have a seat at the table. They hold the love and ambition for their families to grow and prosper in education, work, health and culture. Constitutional recognition through Voice is a forward step for our people and this country.



“In terms of the Voice, we don’t need more politicians. We’ve got enough of those. We’ve actually got leaders in our local and regional space. Our representatives come with a wealth of knowledge and experience. If we as a community have privileged them with that position, then equally governments need to do the same.”

Gary Field Barang Alliance, Empowered Communities



FAR WEST



GOULBURN MURRAY



NGARRINDJERI



NGAANYATJARRA PITJANTJATJARA YANKUNYTJATJARA (NPY)





BROOME



FITZROY CROSSING



BEAGLE BAY



BAWOORROOGA

Empowered Communities: 10 regions across urban, regional and remote Australia



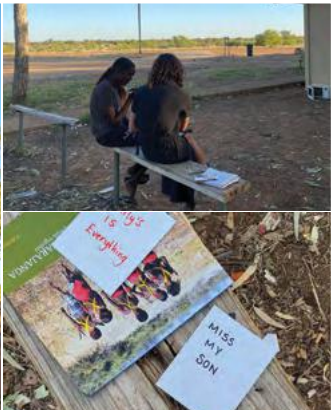
PANDANUS PARK



WANGKAJUNKGA



WANGKAJUNKGA



AURUKUN



EMERGING YOUNG LEADERS



Prime Minister Anthony Albanese at Garma Festival 2022

The 2023 Referendum

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced at Garma 2022 there would be a referendum on constitutional recognition in 2023.

The proposed referendum question that Australians will decide upon is:

*A Proposed Law: to alter the Constitution to recognise the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice.
Do you approve this proposed alteration?*

The proposed Constitutional Amendment is:

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

- 1. there shall be a body, to be called the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice;*
- 2. 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; and*
- 3. 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.”*

Referendum timing

The Government is yet to set a date for the referendum however has advised that it will be **after the footy finals but before Christmas.**

Frequently Asked Questions

What information do I need before the referendum?

- The referendum is about constitutional recognition of First Peoples of Australia.
- Indigenous people have proposed constitutional recognition through Voice, so we can have a say in the matters that impact our lives and futures.
- Having a seat at the table means Indigenous people can play an active role in solving the challenges and issues our families and communities face.
- Voice powers will be advisory and will enable Indigenous people to work in partnership with governments to close the gap.
- The referendum is not about the details of the Voice. What the Voice will look like, how the Voice will operate, and how Indigenous people will choose their Voice members – will be set out in legislation by the Parliament after the referendum.
- If the referendum succeeds, the new Voice partnership will be permanent. But Australia can continue to perfect its new partnership using the Parliament to make any legislative changes needed over time. Amending legislation is the job Parliament is paid to do.

On the words of the proposed amendment

- The constitutional amendment has been developed over a long period since 2007.

- Each word is the result of close consideration by many people, including many Indigenous people across the country, and many lawyers and constitutional experts (including Indigenous lawyers and High Court Judges).
- Some people will say the words are too weak because the Voice will be advisory only. But we cannot expect a body in the Constitution to have law making power – that's just not viable. The Voice will have no veto over parliament. It will negotiate, and work in partnership.
- Some people will say the words are too strong because giving people a say might mean that Parliament won't contradict the Voice. But the Voice will be advisory only. The Voice will have no veto over Parliament. It will negotiate, and work in partnership.
- Like everything in the Constitution, the amendment will leave it to the Parliament to provide the detail on Voice. The law setting out the Voice details will be made after the referendum and the Parliament can continue to change this law as needed..

Voice and Treaty

- The Voice ensures we will have a seat at the table and can negotiate agreements with government.
- The Uluru Statement from the Heart calls for Voice, Treaty, Truth.
- The government has committed to supporting Uluru Statement in full.

Voice and Sovereignty

- The Uluru Statement recognises that First Nations sovereignty, which is a matter of our lore, continues to exist alongside British legal sovereignty brought here.
- This Indigenous sovereignty cannot be taken away by the Australian people voting yes at the referendum in support of constitutional recognition. It will continue to exist.
- Constitutional recognition takes us forward. With constitutional recognition and a Voice, our First Nations cultures and heritage will be included in our nation's future, for the benefit of all.

Will it change life for non-Indigenous Australians?

Building a strong and permanent partnership with First Nations people, one properly anchored in the legal foundations of the nation — the Australian Constitution — will benefit all Australians.

Let's not leave this longstanding issue for our children and grandchildren to resolve. Let's start building a better future together now.

The Voice will be a body that:

- provides independent advice to the Parliament and Government
- is chosen by First Nations people based on the wishes of local communities
- is representative of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- is empowering, community led, inclusive, respectful, culturally informed and gender balanced, and includes youth
- is accountable and transparent

- works alongside existing organisations and traditional structures.

If it is just an advisory body, do we need to change the Constitution?

- Yes, we need the change in the Constitution.
- Constitutional recognition through Voice will ensure governments are committed to working with Indigenous peoples, learning together and improving things in partnership over the long term — it ensures we can build a partnership together, from which no one can walk away.
- This is the first time the question of an Indigenous Voice will be put to the Australian people. A Voice voted in by the Australian people will ensure Indigenous voices are heard and that real—not gammon—negotiation and agreement making occurs to improve things.
- Previous advisory bodies, such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and Indigenous Advisory Council, have been dissolved at the whim of the government of the day.

Shouldn't we focus on practical outcomes – isn't this more bureaucracy?

- Constitutional recognition through Voice will improve practical outcomes by giving Indigenous people affected by decisions a say.
- We've had hundreds of years of non-Indigenous people and bureaucrats deciding what's best for us. That has added bureaucracy and has not worked.

- A Voice can help remove useless and ineffective layers of bureaucracy we have now. For the first time responsibility for closing the gap will be able to be shared between governments and those on the ground where real change must occur.

Who will be eligible to serve on the body?

- Voice members will be chosen by First Nations people based on the wishes of local communities.
- We want people who have consistently contributed to the hard work on the ground to be eligible for nomination and selection. This would ensure a direct link at all levels to the work of local voices.

How will people be chosen?

- The membership of the Voice will be representative of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Representatives will be chosen by local communities.

Will the Voice be better than what we've had in the past?

As a country, we've already learnt a lot to inform the Voice model to be set out in legislation, after a successful referendum. The Voice will be better from the outset than past efforts that sought to give Indigenous people a say. For example, the Voice:

- will not administer programs as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) did
- will not be top-down (like the Indigenous Advisory Council was) but will empower our local voices to be heard from the ground up, because it is in our local communities where change must occur.

If the referendum succeeds there will be a mandate from the Australian people to help make sure the Voice model is effective. A lot of work has already been done, including through the Co Design process led by Marcia Langton and Tom Calma.

What about the Indigenous members of Parliament we already have?

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of Parliament do not hold in their hands the views of Indigenous Australia – that is not why they have been elected to parliament.
- It is not their job to ensure our local voices are heard at every level of government for better decision making to improve practical outcomes.
- They represent their whole electorate and, generally, their respective political party.
- By establishing a Voice, a body will exist with a sole focus on partnering with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities.

Will enshrining the Voice in the Constitution divide people based on race?

No. Constitutional recognition through Voice does not constitute separate treatment on the basis of race.

Our claim is based on our being First Peoples of this country, not on the basis of race. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are indigenous peoples, they are not a separate race. Our race is human, the same as all other Australians.

This is about inclusion and unity. All Australians are equal. Constitutional recognition will not change that fact. The Voice doesn't give anyone more powers or rights.

Reflections



“Back in 1991 at Crocodile Hole, our old people told us we need to work together, to educate our young people, talk to our country and make our spirit and language strong. They called on Aboriginal organisations to work together, undivided by external forces, to advocate for Aboriginal interests across the region with a united voice. Politicians and programs come and go but we remain. We know what is needed but we need a seat at the table. We need a Voice.”

Des Hill, East Kimberley



“We want to keep working in partnership through the Voice to build the opportunity and capability of our families and individuals so we see the social, economic and community development that we need across our Kimberley region.”

Anthony Watson, Kimberley



“Currently we are at the whim of government in terms of what gets tackled. Constitutional recognition through Voice will mean the Australian people are telling governments our voices should not be ignored. This is essential for change long term.”

Wayne Miller, Far West Coast, SA



“Our people’s wellbeing must increase, and our cultural identity has to be strengthened. That can be done through place-based partnerships but there needs to be serious government commitment. Constitutional recognition through Voice will deliver that. We cannot put the handbrake on this.”

Chris Ingrey, LaPerouse



“I am completely loyal to opportunity to bring together as one, the three parts to our nation’s story — our ancient Indigenous foundations, British institutions and inheritance, and our multicultural triumph. If the referendum succeeds, we will maintain our diverse individual and group identities. But we will start a new chapter as one.”

Fiona Jose, Kuku Yalanji, Cape York



“I look at Uncle William Cooper’s story with the 1887 Yorta Yorta residents petition, and then the 1937 petition to King George IV with more than 1800 signatories. I look at Uncle Doug Nichols and others too. What they were talking about is the same as what we are advocating for now, trying to claim a place in society. So it has taken time but we will stay the course. A Voice must happen.”

Paul Briggs, Goulburn Murray, Yorta Yorta



Across the nation we think people can learn from our strong law and cultural leadership. Our community has advanced and sophisticated cultural structures, such as our 13 clan senior cultural authority called the Dilak Council, that are right for Yolngu and we know impact effectively. The Voice will be a dividing point for programs that work positively and those that have a proven failed track record.’

Denise Bowden, North East Arnhem Land



“We’ve proved that we are about taking responsibility, collaboration, and owning it as community so that we are actually part of the story.”

Shane Phillips, Inner City Sydney



“Relying on governments and legislation alone is not enough – things can be started and finished at the whim of politicians. We need to set things up right for a permanent partnership, because this is about the lives and future of our families and children.”

Vickie Parry, Barang Central Coast, NSW

Thank you for taking the time to hear us.

Jarrag Yarrirn!

I am 71 years of age and I live in Kununurra. My parents were members of the Stolen Generation. During my lifetime I've worked hard to try and bring about positive change. I can tell you from firsthand experience, constitutional recognition through Voice is the change we need.

I have been working with other Empowered Communities regions in a pragmatic partnership with the federal government and corporate collaborators, with bipartisan support, since 2015. This work across ten regions nationwide shows having a seat at the table and negotiating decisions in partnership with governments can improve productivity, service delivery, co-design more effective solutions, and promote local and regional development.

What we have been able to achieve is just the beginning of a very exciting change that could be expanded, accelerated, and achieved across the country with constitutional recognition through Voice. The Voice will achieve two key goals.

Firstly, it will deliver on the need for reconciliation to address the history of marginalisation, deprivation, and injustice at the heart of our nation's foundation. It will rightfully acknowledge for the first time in our constitution the unique historical position and standing of Indigenous Australians.

Secondly, the torment of our powerlessness can be addressed. Empowerment is necessary to improve practical outcomes, so that being Indigenous does not remain such an entirely predictable characteristic of being amongst Australia's most disadvantaged. We want jobs, education and good health for our children and grandchildren, just as you do.

After all this time, the proposal for constitutional recognition through Voice provides the pathway forward for this country. This is Indigenous Australians saying, 'we want in' to the Australian Constitution. We want to be part of Australia, formally and permanently.

The Voice is supported by 80% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and I urge all Australians at this crucial juncture, open your hearts and minds.

Let's not leave the question of recognition of Australia's First Peoples unresolved for future generations. Through supporting our call in 2023 for constitutional recognition through Voice, Australians today can create a better future for all of us.



Ian Trust, Chair, East Kimberley, WA

Fiona Jose, Cape York, QLD

Shane Phillips, Inner Sydney, NSW

Chris Ingrey, Inner Sydney, NSW

Paul Briggs, Goulburn Murray, VIC

Vickie Parry, Central Coast, NSW

Lawrie Rankin, Ngarrindjeri Ruwe, SA

Wayne Miller, Far West Coast, SA

Denise Bowden, North East Arnhem Land, NT

Anthony Watson, West Kimberley, WA

Tyronne Garstone, West Kimberley, WA

Des Hill, East Kimberley, WA

Mark Jackman, Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands, NT

Liza Balmer, Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands, NT

Constitutional Recognition through Voice

Let this be the legacy of today's generations for all Australian children and grandchildren to be proud of in decades to come.

As one person you may feel too small to make a difference but together, we can make big change.



We did it in 1967, we can do it again in 2023.

Contact

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Instagram | [empowered_communities](https://www.instagram.com/empowered_communities)

Useful Knowledge Resources

- Yes23 Campaign: <https://yes23.com.au>
- Uluru Dialogues: <https://ulurustatement.org/the-statement/the-dialogues/>
- Together Yes: <https://togetheryes.com.au>
- Get Up Campaign: <https://www.getup.org.au/campaign/first-nations-justice>
- Run for the Voice: <https://www.runforthevoice.com/>
- Boyer Lectures with Noel Pearson: <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/boyerlectures>
- Co-design report: <https://voice.gov.au/resources/indigenous-voice-co-design-process-final-report>
- National Indigenous Australians Agency: <https://voice.niaa.gov.au/>