

Attn: Matthew Maury
PO Box 164
Blackburn VIC 3130

The Hon Ken Wyatt AM, MP
Minister for Indigenous Australians
PO Box 6022
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

27/3/21

Dear Minister,

Re: Interim Report to the Australian Government: Indigenous Voice Co-Design Process

We welcome the Government's Indigenous Voice Co-Design Process Interim Report of January 2021 and are thankful for the work done by the Local, Regional and National Design Groups and are grateful for the work of the co-chairs, Professor Dr Marcia Langton AO and Professor Tom Calma AO. We are aware of both the importance and difficulty in getting input from a wide variety of communities, individuals and experts, especially through the COVID-19 pandemic.

This submission is co-signed by First Nations and non-indigenous Christian organisations who have a history of working together in a variety of contexts. We intend this submission to be a constructive contribution to the important work of developing a meaningful and lasting "First Nations Voice" as called for in the Uluru Statement from the Heart^[1].

There are many **aspects of the Interim Report that we welcome**, namely:

- The nature of the First Nations Voice being to both the Federal Government and Parliament;
- The emphasis on the First Nations Voice having a broad scope to advise on nationally significant matters of critical importance to the social, spiritual and economic wellbeing of First Nations Peoples across Australia; and
- The separation of the First Nations Voice from implementation of projects and programs.

However, we understand that, as this is an Interim Co-Design report, the proposal is not complete and we wish to raise the following issues:

1. The First Nations Voice must be enshrined in the Constitution

We call on the Government to honour its promise to facilitate a referendum in this term of Parliament to seek to enshrine a First Nations Voice in Australia's constitution once the model for the First Nations Voice has been settled.^[2] In calling for this we reiterate, and are led by, the Uluru Statement from the Heart's call for the "establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution"^[3] as a matter of priority.

2. The membership model must ensure there is adequate provision for community-focussed people to be selected/elected to the First Nations Voice.

We applaud the Interim Co-Design Report's call for the First Nations Voice to be to both Federal Parliament and Government and that the Voice should speak in harmony with existing local, regional and State and Territory representative bodies.

We believe, however, that restricting the First Nations Voice to two representatives per state, territory and the Torres Strait Islands detrimentally and unnecessarily limits representative capacity, particularly for those outside metropolitan centres. Limiting representation to so few members would almost inevitably entrench existing interests and would fail to draw in the broad experience of First Nations Peoples from across the continent.

Of special interest to us, given our experience with grassroots organisations across the continent, is the ability for grassroots community leaders to be heard. We know that often these leaders hold significant knowledge about how their communities operate and what is needed for them to thrive. Limiting the number of representatives to two per state, territory and the Torres Strait Islands will make it harder for these communities to be heard.

We, the undersigned, appreciate this opportunity to comment and to contribute to the creation of a more just and equitable Australia and pray for wisdom for the Government and others working to take this proposal forward.

Reverend Mark Kickett

Interim Chairperson - Uniting
Aboriginal and Islander Christian
Congress (National)



Pastor Ray Minniecon

Scarred Tree Ministries



Pastor Tony Riches

Chief Executive Officer -
Aboriginal Evangelical
Fellowship Aus. Inc.



Dena Gower

Chair - Moorditj Keila



Matthew Maury

Chief Executive Officer - Tearfund



John Gilmore

Executive Officer -
Global Mission Partners



[1] The Uluru Statement from the Heart text <https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/ra-statement-from-the-heart-poster-a3.pdf>

[2] Constitutional recognition announcement a positive step towards reconciliation, Reconciliation Australia (2019), <https://www.reconciliation.org.au/constitutional-recognition-announcement-a-positive-step-towards-reconciliation/>

[3] The Uluru Statement from the Heart text <https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/ra-statement-from-the-heart-poster-a3.pdf>