



Sambell Oration 2022

Enshrining a Voice to Parliament – from the Uluru Statement from the Heart

Professor Megan Davis

The Uluru Statement from the Heart has emerged from a constitutional recognition process in Australia that seeks to imbue the voice of First Nations people in the constitutional system, the ancient and modern polities of Australia to anchor a process of agreement making and truth telling.

The exigencies of the Voice to Parliament is that the status quo isn't working for our people. 'Closing the Gap' is not working, and in many areas it's going backwards. But the Uluru Statement from the Heart is much more than that.

After all that has happened to our people, the question was "what does repair look like?"

It looks like Voice and Makarrata - or Voice, Treaty then Truth. When we ran the First Nations dialogues the deliberative process aimed at eliciting from communities what meaningful constitutional recognition might look like, many of our people were cynical. They deserve to be cynical. We said to them in response, law reform is about imagination. Law reform requires you to exercise your imagination and dream of a better day.

What does a better Australia look like? Imagine that Australia can be a better place for your family, your children, and your grannies. Suspend your disbelief that the nation cannot change. Suspend your disbelief that you won't be heard. And on the second day of the three-day dialogue, they turned up, rolled up their sleeves and got down to work.

The men and women, old and young of the Uluru dialogues gave up their weekends to think about how to improve our democracy, not just for them but for all Australians. They decided not to present the Uluru Statement from the Heart to the politicians who were standing by to come to Mtitjulu to receive the Uluru statement in pity. This is not about politicians. This is about Australians working together like we did in 1967. At the rock we made the decision to stare down

the camera and talk directly to the Australian people, to animate their agency and ask them - you - to use your voice to help us get this across the line, because retail Australian politics, ideology, set positions, tribalism and left and right will not get us there.

The constitution is meant to change. It is built to change. By us the Australian people. The Uluru Statement from the Heart is an invitation, a gift to the Australian people. Stan Grant Senior says, 'language is not about who you are but where you are, where we are located'. When people say that this might be about changing the Australian identity, it is not. It is about location.

We are located here together, and we have to co-exist in a peaceful way. We're about to face, or are facing, serious existential crises as a people, as a humankind, as the climate changes and the planet warms up.

The message from the elders and Traditional Owners in the dialogues across the nation was that to face the battle together the country needs peace, and the country cannot be at peace until we resolve this issue, the original grievance. And the Uluru statement is the beginning of that.

Yes, Australia's democracy has been a successful democracy, but not for all, and not for the First Peoples.

After everything that has happened to our people, the killings, the massacres, the genocide, the compulsory racial segregation, the stealing of children and of wages and land, the contemporary manifestation of this, youth detention, youth suicide, incarceration, and child removals - despite all of this, our old people at the dialogues chose love.

They spoke of love. They spoke of peace. They issued an olive branch to the Australian people, and they offer that olive branch to you sitting in this room today, an invitation to walk with us.

We, gathered at the 2017 National Constitutional Convention, coming from all points of the southern sky, make this statement from the heart:

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands and possessed it under our own laws and customs. This our ancestors did, according to the reckoning of our culture, from the Creation, according to the common law from 'time immemorial', and according to science more than 60,000 years ago.

This sovereignty is a spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land, or 'mother nature', and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born therefrom, remain attached thereto, and must one day return thither to be united with our ancestors. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty. It has never been ceded or extinguished and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown.

How could it be otherwise? That peoples possessed a land for sixty millennia and this sacred link disappears from world history in merely the last two hundred years?

With substantive constitutional change and structural reform, we believe this ancient sovereignty can shine through as a fuller expression of Australia's nationhood.

Proportionally, we are the most incarcerated people on the planet. We are not an innately criminal people. Our children are alienated from their families at unprecedented rates. This cannot be because we have no love for them. And our youth languish in detention in obscene numbers. They should be our hope for the future.

These dimensions of our crisis tell plainly the structural nature of our problem. This is *the torment of our powerlessness*.

We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take *a rightful place* in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.

We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution.

Makarrata is the culmination of our agenda: *the coming together after a struggle*. It captures our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination.

We seek a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history.

In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard. We leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country. We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future

Thank you.

Ash Dargan – Larrakia man and Didgeridoo artist

Welcome to this wonderful event. I'm certainly really feeling the space of where we are right now. When I say that, I mean the lands of the Wurundjeri. This country that we're on, this place, the Traditional Owners, the Kulin Nation, this incredible document (the Uluru Statement from the Heart) behind me. It's the original, and when I realised it was the original, I had to pinch myself. This is where we're going as a nation.

I've got three performances for you tonight that speak to the principles of this document, and the first one is Voice. This piece is simply entitled 'Mother's Voice', because the voice of Aboriginal people around the country is the voice of the place that they belong to, the voice of country itself.

Didgeridoo performance – Mother's Voice

This is another moment for Australia. This is what it represents. They always come around under a Labor government, but you'll notice that the spaces between these events that really do shape the future for Indigenous Australia, but really, it's Australia, isn't it? It's a bicultural identity that we're moving towards, something we can all be proud of together. That's what voice means, it means lifting, elevating up Aboriginal voices that work with the opportunities including university, further education. It's not about Closing the Gap, it's just about lifting up the spirit of the Aboriginal people so they can stand with us without shame. A lot of that shame has been placed on the ancestors of all these beautiful people around us and in this struggle that we've had to regain this equal space, this social justice, human rights, things that are fundamental human rights - like self-determination, it's a fundamental human right and we're just talking about that now, you know?

So, this is important stuff that I'm talking about, and tomorrow Australia is going to be an Australia that we can all be proud of. You're going to have to listen to the truth. There has to be that process in this country. It's incredibly important. When I think of truth, I think of the seasonal change up in the Northern Territory. We have a spirit up there named Namagon. He's one of the most powerful spirits, he's the life-giver. He brings the life-giving rains that bring life to everything. But before he comes, you'll see those skies turn dark, and it's scary to be with that in the presence of that, because it's powerful. You see that's what truth is, it's powerful, and it's scary to hear it. You want to shy away from the lightning of the truth, but don't, stand up with it.

We're not pointing the finger. We're just telling you what happened to us. And we want you to feel it with us, that lightning, it can burn. But fire also restores and after that we'll get the life-giving rain, and I tell you what - former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd gave us a bit of that didn't he? He just took the cork out of the bottle in 2008, but everything in the bottle is still there. It's ready to come out. We've all got to feel it together.

So, this piece is the rhythm of an approaching storm. It's one of the most powerful rhythms that I was taught in the Northern Territory. At the start you'll just hear gentleness and that wisp of the wind as it picks up the leaves, and you'll see in the distance the dark clouds start coming and the truth is coming and it's scary: but stand up to it. Greet it as it comes in. Then you'll hear the rhythm of the approaching storm, which is the change that's coming to this nation, and then the rains that will feed the soul of this country so that we can all stand there together proud.

Didgeridoo performance – Namagon

One last one for you. This is for all the road blockers out there in the country. You know, whether you're an organisation, an NGO, a government agency, an individual, a power broker, whatever you

are, if you're a road blocker, just get out of the way because this is coming, right? This is coming for all of us.

In 1967 this State (Victoria) voted 94 per cent, the highest out of any state and territory. If you didn't vote, your parents did. For my people. For all our people. The people here, the Wurundjeri people, all the Kulin Nations, the mob in Queensland, South Australia, all the way up above the tropic of Capricorn, all of us, the central desert mobs. It was beautiful, hey. Please stand with us once more. It's important for you too.

So, the road trains up in the Northern Territory, I don't know whether you've met that particular animal before, but it's a mighty powerful beast and they've got to get somewhere on time. They've got a time limit; they've got to get somewhere. This is going somewhere, right? It's going down the highway of Australia's future and it's taking this big load with it okay? There's three articulated trailers on behind of it and the back one swings around. It's dangerous. You can't really get close to it. It will flick you off the road, and on the Stuart highway...there's no way to pull off. Forget that. Don't be looking at the bush and enjoying the kangaroos and the emus because one of these things will tailgate you. You've just found yourself to be a road blocker, but this thing is getting down the highway. It's got somewhere to go.

I'm the truck driver. Now, these guys will bump on their horn and sometimes if that's not enough they'll wind down their window and give you a serve from outside the window and you'll hear it. They'll be yelling at you like that, so this one's for the road blockers. This one's for the road blockers of treaty, the treaty process that needs to happen in this country. We need to come together; we need to stand together, and we need to sort this stuff out. Okay? For the road blockers. This one's called road train

Didgeridoo performance – Road Train

Thank you very much. My name's Ash Dargan. Have a wonderful night tonight with these beautiful elders coming up and showing us the way to a brighter future in Australia.

Uncle John Baxter

Greetings. My name's John Baxter. Most of us call me Uncle John. I'm a proud Narungga man which means my family, my mob, my history, my culture, my destiny is from a place called Point Pearce over in South Australia.

I was born on Latji country, which is Robinvale, top left corner not too far away from Mildura, but I'm currently living on Wurundjeri land. Have been for quite a while, probably will be for quite a while. I'd like to acknowledge that I live, work, and play on the lands of the Wurundjeri people. I feel very honoured that I've gotten to know quite a number of the elders over time. I've been taught so much. I have learnt and I'm very gracious to be able to be able to recognise and acknowledge them at events such as this.

I would very sincerely like to pay my respect to the elders past, present and emerging. I would also take this opportunity to acknowledge other distinguished guests that are with us here tonight, our First Nations people and from the Brotherhood of St Laurence. I previously came from a background of education, awareness, and advocacy from both the Aboriginal and the disability standpoint, working with an organisation called the First Peoples Disability Network Australia. It gave me the opportunity to travel all over Australia from the major cities into the remotest towns. It was an amazing experience. It also gave me the opportunity to travel overseas, to be a representative. It was an extraordinary experience.

Then, somehow, I got caught up and involved with the Brotherhood of St. Laurence. That was about six years ago give or take. Initially for me the Brotherhood of St. Laurence looked like an ideal space for me to expand my passion for working with cars and especially, being a real mug for these things, Land Rovers. However, as time developed my position changed and it has grown over the years providing me with amazing opportunity for engagement, not only within the Brotherhood of St. Laurence but also reaching out with the Brotherhood of St. Laurence support through other organisations, both community and mainstream, helping develop our Reconciliation Action Plan, helping take acknowledgement of this amazing document.

This here is the original Uluru Statement [behind him]. Please take the time to notice that. Have a good look at it. Have a read of it. We have been - we being the Brotherhood - encouraging engagement and inclusion on numerous projects, and I'm very, very honoured to help contribute tonight to the Sambell Oration, and I thank those who have put their trust in me.

Named in honour of former BSL executive director Geoffrey Sambell, the Sambell Oration seeks to throw a spotlight on an important social justice issue affecting Australia, and in particular affecting those who are experiencing disadvantage. The Sambell Oration has been running each year since 1981 - apart from, unfortunately, the last two years due to COVID. We are now delighted to be able to resume presenting this event.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence is a social justice organisation working alongside people experiencing disadvantage to address the fundamental causes of poverty in Australia. Our mission is to pursue lasting change to create a more compassionate and just society where everybody can thrive. The Sambell Oration is one way we look to catalyse action on addressing disadvantage. We can think of no more an important subject right now than the one we are focusing on tonight. The Brotherhood supports the Uluru Statement from the Heart and stands with all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people calling for a First Nations voice to be enhanced in the Australian constitution.

We think the referendum next year is an enormous opportunity for our country to create lasting change for everyone, especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. If I may, can I share

briefly about the Australian Electoral Commission. Their objectives are to increase enrolment, voter turnout, formality, and employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Australian elections. Under its program the AEC aims to deliver effective culturally appropriate services to Indigenous Australians. They work directly with communities, or in partnership with other organisations to deliver services in ways that meet cultural and regional needs. Services include delivery of electoral information sessions, tailored materials for indigenous voters, partnership with government and non-government agencies and a range of other community outreach activities.

AEC Enrol Now video shown

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT: When it comes to elections and referendums your vote matters for all us mob. No matter whether you live here, here, around about here or everywhere. All our votes happen. Help us have a say about what's going on in our country. Get ready to vote loud and vote proud. Enrol now. Enrol now. Head to [AEC.gov/enrol](https://www.aec.gov.au/enrol) now. It's our voice, our future. Authorised by the Electoral Commission, Canberra.

Orators in conversation with Travers McLeod, Executive Director, BSL

Trav: Megan and Aunty Pat, first of all thank you for being with us tonight. Can I start by asking how you met, the two of you? What brought you together?

Aunty Pat: Well, I'd been asked to Chair the Referendum Council this is a long time ago now, and I saw it was a huge committee, 16 people. It was awful, trying to herd cats, you know. I'd heard about Megan we met very briefly a long time ago in 2008, I think, and I knew of her work, but we hadn't actually met socially, if you like. So when we all came together for this huge council, Megan and I sort of blended very quickly and we have now a very close relationship with completely different people and also there's a generational thing. Megan's really young, she's just coming into her career and I'm kind of standing in the wings to go out. There was this generational thing, but she's very generous and kind and shy and super smart. Super smart. So we have a now long-term relationship, it's a very close one. We kind of depend on almost getting to be a co-dependency sort of thing, especially when we're in these sorts of forums, I think "what are you going to say? What are you going to say? You go first." And sometimes if Megan goes on to stage without me, I know she's not really nervous because I'm not there so it's getting really weird, but it's a very close relationship and I have the greatest respect and admiration. I have to say, despite the generational difference I've learned so much. I've learned heaps from Megan. She's a really good diplomat, very sophisticated, very polished, I've learnt a lot. I think that's enough, hey.

Trav: For now. For now. Speaking of diplomacies, Megan, can you explain for the audience where the design process for the Uluru Statement and the Uluru dialogues came from?

Megan: Yes, I suppose the genesis of the design came from the work that we did in 2015 where there was a campaign called the Recognise campaign. So I'd been involved with constitutional recognition since Prime Minister Gillard's process started, so I've been involved for the whole 12 years, which started December 2010. But 10 years before that, my whole practice as a constitutional scholar had been about Indigenous recognition. But we'd got to a point post-Gillard where both sides of politics were kind of coalescing around this idea that you could have a Referendum on something that was purely symbolic. That really alarmed us because it was apparent to anyone who listened to the community that symbolism wasn't going to cut it in terms of constitutional recognition.

So a number of us went and saw Prime Minister Abbott and said this isn't going to work. You're going to have to run another process. He didn't necessarily agree because it's the kind of thing where you get elites in the ears of politicians who are saying "no, it's the quiet majority of Aboriginal people will support symbolism" but we knew that wasn't true, so we asked for a new process. He agreed and then he got kicked out and then Turnbull came in as Prime Minister, and Turnbull set the process up. So that was the work of the Referendum Council, to set up a process to in some ways retro fit consultation with the communities.

But we didn't want it to be just consultation, a kind of 'tick and flick' exercise. We wanted it to be a process where people were fully informed about the options on the table, and so Turnbull started it about December 2015 and then we spent 2016

designing. I was the chair of the subcommittee of the Referendum Council's Indigenous group, and I think a lot of the work - a lot of the thinking that went into that - happened in 2015, the year before we started, particularly around the notion or the concept of not being heard. You know, what is it like for a population to be saying things and then the entire political and legal system just not hearing it and not listening? That drove a lot of the research work and the thinking that I did around what became the dialogues.

So we've never had this kind of process in our community across Australia, a process where the methodology mitigates for things like group think, right? We knew we didn't want activists and others coming into the room and screaming down others. You needed to have a process that allowed all people in a very respectful way to hear what we were doing, what was the exercise, what was the opportunity on the table, constitutional reform, what might that look like?

We had multiple options from the expert panel to take out to communities – including Treaty and the Voice to Parliament. These were the options that we took out to communities, and we worked with communities to ensure that when the people were chosen for the dialogues, that the process wasn't dominated by elites, but actually would be people that don't have a voice. That was critical in the process. You couldn't have a past where you were a professional lobbyist in Canberra or in any of the Parliament Houses around the country. You couldn't be a significant leader who already has a voice. You couldn't be a CEO or the head of an Aboriginal peak body. It was designed in a way to make sure that we could hear from people that never get to talk.

Then the methodology was run over a three-day period that ensured there was legal and civics education, in addition to plenary meetings where everybody talked about things, breakout meetings that allowed people to have the space to talk about the issues and the legal reforms and their concerns and other things. For example, we were really pressured to have Town Hall meetings, but we knew they would be dominated by the loudest. By having breakout groups working off the back of the plenaries you have lots of groups of shy, introverted people, people that never talk up because they don't want to be vilified - especially women. Then in dialogues we had these amazing groups that broke off and had conversations about the model and then came back to the plenary. It was a really important design feature, very bottom up, that allowed people to drive the discussion themselves and to come up with a reform off the back of all of those options that went to the dialogue. We spent a whole year socialising it in community.

So we travelled around the country and talked to Traditional Owners and peaks and significant individuals in the movement. We ran a trial dialogue at Melbourne Law School. We didn't have professional facilitators because we felt like it was better to have people, or mob, in local communities that led the discussion. We brought them into the trial dialogue where they learnt about all the issues and were able to go back and then lead that conversation. There was a lot of thought, hey Aunty Pat, that went into the process – we had lived in an era of tick and flick consultation where people were profoundly disappointed in the way that all levels of government engaged with them and so we wanted to do it differently. A lot of work went into making sure it was a fair and robust process.

Trav: This sounds like an example of best practice and a genuine democratic innovation and consultation with First Nations people, and I've heard you and Aunty Pat describe it as giving voice to the voiceless. Aunty Pat, I think you spoke to over 12,000 people and there were 200,000 submissions received in some way, shape or form. Take the group into what it was like individually and as a team through that what must have been a very exhausting process.

Aunty Pat: Well, we went all over Australia talking to people. We had 13 dialogues across the country - it was a mix, a sample group, if you like. We were very specific about the fact that we wanted 60 per cent of people to be traditional owners or custodians of land and country, 20 per cent of the organisation that were influential in the area, and 20 per cent were people that didn't fit either of the two categories, like Stolen Generations people, influential people in their towns and in the area.

Without specifically saying so we wanted to include people that were outspoken - whether you agreed with them or not - so we had everybody in the tent. That was the set-up for every one of the 13 dialogues. Same agenda, same kind of formula. We selected a host organisation who hosted everything and those of us on the Referendum Council, we became information givers. We weren't facilitators, we were just supplying information. So that's how it worked.

And then the last function of each of those dialogues was to select seven delegates to go to the National Convention in Uluru. So the numbers look small, but they had all gone through this whole process. By the time we got to the Convention Megan and her team had gone through all of what everybody said. We still have those bits of papers: it was a process like this, they were put up on the wall, every sentence was gone through and then we asked, "are you happy with that?" "Is that a true record of what you all said?" and they said yes. Then they all signed off, and we still have all of those sheets of paper.

An analysis was made of all of those sheets of paper, once again by the constitutional lawyers at the Indigenous Law Centre at UNSW, and what came out was 'Voice' and then 'agreement making' and 'Makarrata'...you'll notice the word "treaty" isn't used there.

You know Australia is one of the few liberal democracies in the world that doesn't have any kind of arrangements or settlements with its First Peoples.

Trav: Thank you Aunty Pat. While you've got the microphone, there must have been some light-hearted moments through these dialogues on country, 13 dialogues. Can you tell us one story that stuck out for you as a particularly hilarious memory?

Aunty Pat: I think that's one of the reasons why we've lived so long and are so resilient is our sense of humour, which can be really wicked and not understood. Our people are always undercutting each other, it's what Australians call 'taking the Micky' and what-have-you.

But you know in terms of the use of language over all of those dialogues, one had to speak plain English so all the people could understand. We were often talking about abstracts concepts for some people, and we offered translations at every dialogue if people wanted it. The meeting at Ross River outside of Alice Springs was conducted in three Aboriginal languages as well as English, so four languages to hold that one

meeting. We spent a week in Alice Springs talking to all the interpreters, explaining the concepts that they could get. Often it's not one word, it would be a whole phrase needed to describe a concept. So that's just an example of the robustness of this whole process, because there's a lot of misinformation about what happened.

For good or bad, we made the decision not to film the dialogues. We would love to have a documentary to show you, but that was the choice we made. We didn't want people to feel inhibited by strangers in the room or voyeurs or getting misunderstood. So the whole thing was a very careful process - but we are in the process of making a documentary, we have a whole lot of stills, so we're putting all the stills together with a voiceover.

All the ceremonial activities were held at Mutitjulu...it took them three months to build a ceremonial ground. For the actual dialogues we had to be in the town centre where all the big hotels are for the audio-visual facilities, but all the ceremonies, several, were held at Mutitjulu.

Trav: In a moment we have a treat - we're going to ask the youth dialogue co-chairs, Bridget Cama and Allira Davis to make their way on stage and for Uncle John to come back and to focus the discussion on what the referendum next year might mean for Australia.

Before we invite Bridget and Allira and Uncle John to come back, Megan, can you tell us what it was like reading the statement at Uluru on the 26th of May 2017 and how you and Aunty Pat and others have helped to organise the effort in the five years since?

Megan: The National Convention was a huge amount of work and I just remember running every which way. I mean I remember standing up and reading it in the sense that I remember the standing ovation and the applause, because we pulled together everybody's work and then read it out and it was more than the Uluru statement, it was the very lengthy Aboriginal history of Australia that's a part of the Uluru statement. So we read out the legal justification for what the dialogues had decided in terms of the law reform, and then the Uluru statement. I kind of remember it out at the rock: that was later that afternoon, and we decided not to read it and then we were sitting there, you (Aunty Pat), me, Mark and Noel (Pearson), and Noel's going "you've got to read it". I said, "I don't have it in front of me" and then we ran to someone's car and grabbed it and then I went out to the ceremony and read it.

I mean it was a powerful thing because we'd done the work for almost two years. We'd travelled right around the country, and as Pat said, although originally, we were going to do 32 sites, the Commonwealth cut our funds and we could only do 12 or 13. So we needed to make sure the decision-making was robust given it was just a sample of our people. As Pat said we didn't really interfere with anything to do with the running of the dialogues. They were auspiced by land councils, but we did insist that 60 per cent of the invitation list had to be Traditional Owners, so it had to be cultural authority given that at least for us growing up, that was how our people make decisions.

We're a collective or we are a group of polities or collectives, we're a gerontocracy, so our decision makers are old, and it was really important to have them at these

meetings and endorse the outcome. In retrospect it looks really historic, but at the time it was just a huge privilege to just be in that space and lead that work, and as Pat and I always say, our people came up with a solution, a constitutional solution that no constitutional lawyer had thought of prior to the dialogues.

I think that speaks to the importance of self-determination and the fact that if you give our people a go, they'll come to a position that's really clever and reasonable. It was a great honour and privilege to be asked to read it out.

Trav: I know you're going to read it to this group later on this evening, but I want to invite Bridget Cama and Allira Davis to come up on stage and Uncle John to come back as well. Let me just quickly read their biographies

Bridget is a Wiradjuri and Pasifika Fijian woman was born and grew up in Lithgow, New South Wales, and has connections to the Cunnurong River just outside of Mudgee. Bridget has been working with the dialogue since March 2019, is an associate of the Indigenous Law Centre at UNSW and a legal support team to the Uluru dialogue. She is also the cochair of the Uluru youth dialogue alongside Allira Davis.

Allira is a Cobble Cobble woman who was born in Logan, Queensland, and grew up in Beenleigh. Allira completed her Diploma in Government specialising in project management and has worked in public service, including in emergency management and business operations where she worked on policies, grants and managing programs.

Allira and Bridget have been a double act running the Uluru Youth Dialogues and organising and co-chairing the Uluru Youth Summit in 2019. Uncle John, over to you to ask the next set of questions about the referendum that's coming and what it would mean if we accepted as a nation that gift of love that Aunty Pat has spoken so movingly about.

Uncle John: Thanks Trav. Welcome to you all. May I start with hopefully a nice easy question. What is it going to mean to Australia, to all of us, to all of you, if we vote yes at the Referendum on a Voice to Parliament?

Aunty Pat: There's a real opportunity here for us to change the nation, to change the narrative of the nation, and it's going to take us as a nation to reimagine who we should and could be. What's on the table is not unusual in global politics of Indigenous peoples around the world, but nevertheless it was not expected, that's why it was met with so much rejection - well Prime Minister Turnbull as you know just wouldn't even allow the country to have a conversation. But we didn't take no for an answer, we just kept going, and six years later along came a Prime Minister (Albanese) who put his full weight behind changing the nation. That's what it's about.

In fact, for all of us who are over 18 this is probably one of the most important decisions you're going to make. The other thing is that this is going to be a really long debate and it's going to get really ugly. We can't cover all of the misinformation you're going to hear. We just won't get around to the 20 million people or however many of voting age.

So what we need is that when you get into the polling booth, just you and your conscience, you have to take responsibility for how you vote. That's the only thing that we can do, I think. We remain positive because as you would know, we gifted the Uluru Statement - the document as you really nicely call it – so that you just have to think about what country you want to live in, what our values are and who do we stand for as Australians today.

One of the most amazing things, I think, that we heard in the 13 Uluru dialogues was this belief by the Aboriginal people that we spoke to that fundamentally Australians were decent and good people. They said to me, “well they helped us in 1967 and we're going to ask them again”. So that's the ask: to do what happened in 1967.

Suspend your pessimism or whatever. This is a real opportunity for us to rise to the occasion as we did in 1967. The time is right. We're on the right side of history. You know a lot about it. This idea that you don't know anything about it is wrong, you do. You do. All the families in all the little towns, we all grew up together. We don't go to each other's weddings or Christenings, but we certainly go to all the funerals because the families know each other. You know a lot and we're asking you again to stand up.

Uncle John: Thank you. What a beautiful answer. Thank you very much. Allira and Bridget, can you just tell us about the youth dialogues and how the campaign for the voice is shaping up for young Australians?

Bridget: Hi everybody. I just want to acknowledge that both Allira and I as the Youth Dialogue co-chairs wouldn't have this platform to speak if it wasn't for our senior leadership, particularly Aunty Pat Anderson and Professor Megan Davis.

In 2019 Allira and I both attended one of the meetings following the issuing of the Uluru statement. Aunty Pat and Prof (Davis) continued to meet with mob around the nation and developed the Uluru dialogues which we still have today. I think we all know that we wouldn't be here in this room talking about it if not for your leadership on this issue. Because every time that we got a “no” from people it was Aunty Pat and Prof who said, “we just have to keep pushing forward”. Through that Uluru dialogue work they've created the opportunity that all Australians will benefit from. But going back to how the Uluru Youth Dialogue started, Allira and I were at one of those meetings and we were just running mics around and we thought, “you know what, there's not a lot of young people in this room, but there's a huge opportunity there for young First Nations peoples to play an integral role in the people's movement around the Uluru Statement from the Heart and to activate around this issue”.

We approached Megan and Aunty Pat and they were fully supportive and said, “go for it” and they've been great mentors ever since. Basically, we brought together over 60 First Nations youth from around the nation in December 2019 and we just talked to them about what the Uluru Statement from the Heart is, what the reforms are, the journey leading to the Uluru statement being issued and then what it will actually mean in practice. From that we've continued to co-chair our youth dialogue group, led by First Nations young people aged between 18 and 30, but walking alongside our very important, non-Indigenous youth as well to make sure we're all a part of this journey to make the referendum happen.

Allira: I think just adding to what Bridget is saying, I think young people are very progressive nowadays - not that they weren't back in the day - but I think we also have an opportunity with social media as well. I don't know how many of you have Tok-tok in this room, but I'm hoping you guys have Tok-tok. Actually, Aunty Pat's got one of our highest views on Tok-tok, so definitely check that out.

I think young people are very progressive and I think in our research it stated that our strongest supporters are young people. So we need to make sure that we are taking advantage of that opportunity. We also need to support our senior leadership who have done this for several decades, as our professor alluded to that she has been in this process for 12 years. That's a long time, so supporting them and making sure that we can push this over the line. As Aunty Pat says, "we're not taking no for an answer" and we need to stand strong on their shoulders and make sure that we can push this and help our young people understand as well.

We always say - I mean it is involving the constitution, but we always say to our young people - the simple message is that we need a Voice in our country and Bridget always says we need a change in our lifetime. Unfortunately, some people who have signed the statement have passed on and we need to continue to fight for them and make sure that we can educate Australia on this big change of our nation.

So, it's exciting times but it's also very nerve-racking, and I think we definitely can do it. We've got the support - and this might sound pretty nerdy, but I think it's really cool that we're going to a referendum. Our most successful referendum was the 1967 referendum and that's saying something. I mean the constitution is supposed to be changed, and the fact that we're going to a Referendum means I think it's going to change the nation. As we say - history is calling. Young people all the way, but also making sure that we're supporting our senior leadership.

Uncle John: Thank you very much. Megan and Aunty Pat, we saw the National Party announce last week that they wouldn't support the voice. What did you make of their decision, and do you think they'll change their mind?

Megan: I think the decision, perhaps, speaks to the exigency of the Voice. It was very disappointing for the national party to reject something in which there was no detail provided to them yet. It's not dissimilar to things that happen regularly in the indigenous affairs space where leaders don't read. In our community we have a saying called "leaders are readers" and we say this to our Uluru youth mob all the time. You must read. You've got to read these documents. You must read them and comprehend and understand what's going on. You can't wing it. I did make this comment to David Littleproud after he was verballing me on national media saying that I was the reason he was voting no. I said to him "there's no detail yet, mate, so this is what it might look like, but let's have that conversation once the detail is released". So, I've nothing more to say on that other than in a western democracy like ours it's absolutely outrageous that a political party would conclude that they're not going to support it on the basis of nothing.

But in addition to that, a really important point is they've made an assessment that the Voice won't 'Close the Gap' without any detail. If I can be political for one second, this is a party who for eight years was in charge of Closing the Gap. It's apparent to us as First Nations people that they're not necessarily skilled to be able

to make an assessment of what will Close the Gap. So, for them to make that assessment based on nothing was really disappointing, and I think they will revisit it.

I'll let Allira and Bridget perhaps talk to this, but one of the really important reasons that Andrew Gee in the National Party came out the next day and said he would support the Voice is the work of the Uluru youth in Bathurst and Orange and Lithgow. Our Uluru youth have been engaging with him for a number of years, running after him at country shows with Uluru shirts on, and through working with the community they've been able to sit him down and yarn with him about the Voice and he was the first to break ranks after the WA National party. I think that says something. I don't know if you two want to talk to that, but we're really proud of the activist work that our young people are doing in each of the 151 electorates and in this case, it had an impact upon Andrew to say, "I'm not going to go with the party room position, I'm going to support the Voice".

Bridget: Yeah, so a lot of the work - I would say all the work - the Uluru Youth are doing is around educating everyday Australians, getting out on the ground doing activations, holding stories, holding yarning circles and stuff like that on the ground to ensure that people are best informed when it's time to go to vote. But a part of that work also involves meeting with key stakeholders in the community. So, in this case Professor Davis is referring to a few of our Wiradjuri youth from central west New South Wales had actually set up an activation where they worked with the local land council and the local Aboriginal medical service to host an information session in the community on the weekend. They also briefed the local council and then they asked for the council to actually endorse the Uluru Statement with the support of the local elders and those community-controlled organisations. As part of that activation, they involved Andrew Gee and our youth actually let the community speak and said to them "this is your voice, use it", and the community actually told Andrew Gee they were 100 per cent in support of the Uluru Statement from the Heart and of course the Voice proposal. That's the back story to how Andrew Gee was informed by the community and our youth played a role in doing that. That's one example, but we're doing it across the nation in various communities.

Uncle John: So, a final question. Aunty Pat, what can an organisation like the Brotherhood of St. Laurence do to support the push for lasting change?

Aunty Pat: You know, this says more about my prejudice than anything, but the first group of people that came out after we walked away from the rock was the corporate sector. Lots and lots of large organisations, like corporates, pledged their support to the Uluru statement and that continues today. So, all the banks, Telstra, Qantas. We don't have any entree with these groups. But yes, they heard it and they understood. That support continues today.

We also have a lot of support from the faith-based groups. The Catholic Bishop has made a statement, also the Buddhists, Hindus, the Muslims, as well as all the Christian faiths. A lot of support from the faith sector.

The other big sector that supports us is FECCA, the ethnic communities peak. You may know from the statistics that in fact Australia is 'browning'...those people from those various ethnic communities, they know about oppression, they know about racism, they know what we're talking about. They've experienced it as well. So, in

that regard they've become like brothers and sisters and a lot of work has been done in their own communities. You might know or not, but the Uluru Statement from the Heart is on our website...in 61 languages as well as English and 21 First Nations languages and that's my job, to build on that as we go along. It's wonderful to hear the languages.

Oh, and all the sports - not all the sports – but particularly the NRL, because Megan is the Commissioner of the NRL and a mad fan.

Megan: We were the first sport to come out. It's important.

Aunty Pat: That's true. So, all of those big groups around the country have provided, and still continue to provide, a lot of support. If you go on to the Uluru Statement site and just press 'Arabic' to hear the statement in Arabic, it is absolutely beautiful. It sounded like this undulating poem in this strange language. It was just lovely. So that hasn't happened before either. Please go to the website. There's a lot of information there, webinars and what-have-you. Inform yourselves.

If I have to leave one message for the referendum, you need to inform yourselves so you can make an informed decision. Like I say this is probably the most important decision all of those over 18 - so inform yourselves. Go onto our website and get as much information as you can and ask. Contact us. This is how we're going to win this, through every small town: old-fashioned activism, just talking to people, putting up a stall with the young groups at a shopping centre and what-have-you.

You might have seen we've had a lot of support from Lendlease. They had these banners they left up last Christmas right through until April. I think over 19 million Australians recorded seeing those banners. That's a huge reach and a big donation by Lendlease. Qantas had videos on various flights as well. So the support is growing.

I don't want to be Pollyanna here, we've got a really, really long way to go and this is going to be tough, but Australians seem to be rising to the occasion. In a different poll, the support has steadily been rising - not rapidly, but gently rising to about 60 per cent who would vote 'Yes' if they held a referendum now. So it's climbing slowly. There's a hard-core group of 20, 30 per cent, you know, that probably aren't going to vote, but we do know once we can get to some of those groups and talk to them, educate them what it's all about, they do change their minds. So talk to your colleagues, friends and families and inform yourself.

Trav McLeod – Response to the Orators

Thank you, Aunty Pat and Professor Davis. Ladies and gentlemen, how special to have two of the co-chairs of the Uluru Statement and the Uluru Youth Dialogue with us. I just want to offer a few thoughts on behalf of the Brotherhood of Laurence as to why we think this is a moment for Australia and a moment we want to support and move that 60 per cent figure higher so we have a successful and resounding vote when it happens, hopefully next year.

The Brotherhood of St. Laurence has a proud history of working with and supporting First Nations people since we were founded during the great depression. Our work today stretches beyond Melbourne right across the country where we've got 2500 staff and volunteers working to build confidence and capability right across the life course, especially for people experiencing poverty and disadvantage.

One example I want to mention is our early learning program, the Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters, or the HIPPY program as it's colloquially known. Thirty per cent of the tutors are First Nations people employed during the last year and they play a vital role in generating much greater educational and life outcomes. Over the next five years HIPPY is going to be working very closely to improve and increase the partnerships and leadership by Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, with 50 per cent of HIPPY delivered in First Nations sites.

Another example is our Education First Youth Foyers where we have high numbers of young Indigenous men and women at risk of homelessness who come to live, study, complete training and take up jobs, particularly in our services in Shepparton and Broadmeadows.

The heart of BSL, our head office, is a few kilometres away from here near the corner of Brunswick and Gertrude Streets in Fitzroy. As you know this historic area is one of the traditional meeting places of First Nations people. A wonderful actor and activist who was sadly lost to us this year, and three years ago this week, helped BSL's disability services launch an art exhibition with Uncle John showcasing the works of artists with disability for the 2019 International Day of People with Disability. You'll also know that part of Brunswick from the famous Charcoal Lane song released 32 years ago and the beautiful voice of another magnificent elder also sadly lost to us this year who sang about walking along side-by-side to the end of Gertrude Street. One of his other songs took the children away, haunts all of us. It begins:

"This story's right, this story's true, I would not tell lies to you.

Like the promises they did not keep, and how they fenced us in like sheep.

Said to us come take our hand, sent us off to mission land.

Taught us to read, to write and pray, then they took the children away."

When he died, they played that song in my daughter's year one classroom in Brunswick. She came home and asked a very simple question: why? The powerful voice of that elder portrayed the torment of the powerlessness described in the Uluru Statement which the Voice to Parliament can help to end.

BSL embraced the Uluru Statement when it was released in 2017 and we've accepted the generous invitation, the gift of love that Aunty Pat has spoken so movingly about with Megan and Noel Pearson, and everybody involved with the Uluru statement. We know though that embracing the Uluru Statement is not enough. We need to ensure the empowerment that is sought through structural, lasting change is done, and only then will our children walk together with First Nations

children into an adulthood that is fairer, more just and more equal than it has been. How deadly it would be to watch this generation stand alongside each other in schools, workplaces, community spaces and in decision making roles across the country on equal terms and with equal opportunities, enriched by the eldest living culture this planet has seen.

In BSL's view Australia won't be complete without the Voice. Professor Davis has been spot-on in her commentary on this for so many years. This is exactly the sort of lasting change that can help to define us as a nation and to improve us as a nation. Good democracies are stable, but they are not static, and the best democracies renew their constitutions and charge them with even greater purpose. The Uluru Statement gives Australia a chance for lasting change, the chance to tell a new story, to make a new promise to First Nations people and a new promise to each other. One that's true, one that every generation can look to - not with doubt and shame but with hope and with pride.

The challenge we've been set tonight as we've learnt more about how the Uluru dialogues and Uluru Statement came together and the promise of a First Nations Voice to Parliament, the challenge for organisations and individuals in this room and watching online is clear. Hand on heart, BSL still has work to do on our reconciliation journey. We need to keep stepping up internally and externally if we're serious about walking together and being part of this movement for a better future.

I want to thank Megan, Aunty Pat, Allira and Bridget. Thank you for everything you've done tonight and for being here. Thank you for telling the story of the Uluru Statement. Thank you, Ash Dargan, thank you Shayne Elliott, thank you Uncle John, and thank you Dr Kyle Turner. I know BSL is keen to do our part to make that a resounding 'Yes' next year.