



Brotherhood of St Laurence
Working for an Australia free of poverty



A Voice to Parliament - Frequently Asked Questions

What is Indigenous Constitutional Recognition and why is it important?

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been calling for recognition in Australia's constitution for decades. While they were given the right to vote in federal elections in 1962, and the 1967 Referendum changed the Constitution so that laws could be made for everybody including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, there is still no formal recognition of our First Nations people in the Constitution. This is considered important because it is the document that formally governs the way our country runs.

After more than 15 years of discussion and consultation, Indigenous representatives came together in 2017 to develop the Uluru Statement from Heart that called for a representative 'Voice to Parliament' as the first step for enshrining recognition of Indigenous people in our Constitution.

What is a Voice to Parliament?

A Voice to Parliament is an Indigenous representative body that provides advice to the Parliament and Government on laws and policies that have a particular impact on their families and communities. It provides a way of hearing the views and voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people when legislation is being drafted, when initiatives are being funded and when programs are being evaluated to see what impact they have had.

What difference will it make?

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will finally have a chance, through their representatives on the Voice, to have a say on decisions that impact their lives. While there have been different advisory bodies set up in the past, they haven't been enshrined in the Constitution, so they have been established or shut down at the whim of the Government of the day. Being enshrined in the Constitution means that the Voice to Parliament will have long term legitimacy and impact.

Will the Voice to Parliament have decision-making powers?

No. At the end of the day Parliament will still be the final decision-makers, but they will be required to take advice directly from First Nations people on issues that impact them. Governments will no longer have an excuse to say they didn't have a way to get input from First Nations people.

How will the Voice to Parliament work?

The Government, the Referendum Working Group and the Constitutional Expert Group has been consulting with relevant communities and involving them in the design details for how the Voice works.

The question that will be asked at the referendum in the second half of 2023 is as follows:

"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 Government has also announced how the Constitution will be amended to enshrine the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in law, which is effectively how the Voice will work in practice:

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

There shall be a body, to be called the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice;

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;

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.

Do First Nations People support constitutional recognition and a Voice to Parliament?

While not every First Nations Person supports a Voice to Parliament, the vast majority do. Importantly, these ideas come from those represented in the First Nations Regional Dialogues where twelve large meetings, or Dialogues, took place across Australia and culminated in a National Convention of over 250 delegates at Uluru in the heart of the country. Together those delegates conceived, wrote and signed the Uluru Statement from the Heart, agreeing to its components and reforms. It was an act of self-determination.

Why is BSL supporting the campaign for Constitutional Recognition and establishment of a Voice to Parliament?

There are many reasons that BSL supports these two actions, including alignment with our overall values and purpose as a social justice organisation and our vision for an Australia free of poverty. Most important is the fact that Indigenous people have themselves organised, consulted and determined that this is the best way forward to achieve change. We accept the generous offer of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to walk with them in a movement for a better future.

How can I find out more about the campaigns for a Voice to Parliament?

Places to find out more information and how to get involved include:

Websites:

[Uluru Statement](#)
[From the Heart Campaign](#)
[Reconciliation Australia](#)

Books/articles:

- *Everything You Need to Know About the Uluru Statement from the Heart* (Professor Megan Davis, Professor George Williams) – June 2021
- *Finding the Heart of the Nation – The Journey of the Uluru Statement towards Voice, Treaty and Truth* (Thomas Mayor) – 2019
- *Finding Our Heart, A Story about the Uluru Statement for Young Australians* by Thomas Mayor (specifically written for young people)
- [An Indigenous Voice to Parliament will not give 'special rights' or create a veto](#) (Professor Anne Twomey) – 2021
- [Indigenous Voice Co-design Process Final Report](#) – July 2021

Videos:

[History is Calling](#) (TV ad, 1 min viewing time)

Education materials:

[Short Course – A Voice to Parliament](#) (15–20 mins) – prepared by From the Heart and the Uluru Statement

A note about our artwork

This logo was designed for the BSL Reconciliation Action Plan by talented Wagiman artist, Tara Butterworth. Tara worked at BSL for two years as a Local Area Coordinator (LAC) for the NDIS based in Niddrie, Melbourne.



Acknowledgement of Country

The Brotherhood of St. Laurence acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land and waterways on which our organisation operates. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past, present and emerging.