



Anglican Church of Australia

Public Affairs Commission

Submission of the Chairs of the Public Affairs Commission and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Anglican Council of the Anglican Church of Australia to the Inquiry into the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice Referendum: CONSTITUTION ALTERATION (ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER VOICE) 2023

Preamble

1. This submission is made jointly by the Chairs of the Public Affairs Commission (PAC) and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Anglican Council (NATSIAC) of the Anglican Church of Australia (ACA) in response to the Inquiry into the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice Referendum: CONSTITUTION ALTERATION (ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER VOICE) 2023.
2. The PAC is a body set up, amongst other matters, to respond to aspects of public affairs as referred by the Primate, Standing Committee or General Synod of the ACA or initiated by the PAC. The views expressed in this submission are only the views of the Chair of the PAC and should not be taken to reflect the opinion of the ACA, the Primate, the Standing Committee, or any of the Dioceses.
3. NATSIAC formally represents the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the Church nationally. It assists individuals and communities by providing pastoral care, and it also assists, encourages and resources Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ministries.

Background

4. The ACA has confirmed its support for constitutional recognition for first nations people and a voice to the Commonwealth Parliament.
5. In 2017, the following resolution (R28/17) was passed at the Seventeenth Session of the General Synod:

The General Synod:

1. *Supports the recommendation of the Referendum Council for a constitutionally-entrenched First Nations' Voice to the Commonwealth Parliament;*
 2. *Encourages the governments in Australia to seek to negotiate in good faith with First Nations' Peoples towards treaties or other similar forms of agreement;*
 3. *Requests the General Secretary to convey this resolution to the Prime Minister, State Premiers, and Leaders of the Opposition;*
 4. *Requests the Public Affairs Commission in consultation with NATSIAC to prepare resources, including summaries and theological reflections for use by Anglican parishes, schools and organisations, on the Referendum Council Report on any subsequent referendum questions and on the progress of treaty or similar negotiations.*
6. Bishop Chris McLeod, the National Aboriginal Bishop, signed an endorsement of the Statement from the Heart with other faith leaders in 2023.

Statement

7. As Chairs of PAC and NATSIAC respectively we:
 - A. Vigorously uphold the desirability and necessity of the constitutionally enshrined recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First People of Australia (s129).
 - B. Deny that this is racist by explicit or implicit imputation but rather a recognition of the factual account of country and nation.
 - C. Vigorously uphold the desirability and utility of the establishment of 'the Voice' as an enduring body with the powers as established in the Bill in question.
 - D. We do not expect that this will be an immediate cure for the ills of dispossession.
 - E. We do expect that ensuring adequate opportunity to give voice to matters concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First People of Australia is the first step to the larger project of reconciliation which will drive practical measures capable of closing the gap between the First Peoples of Australia and subsequent settlers.
 - F. Notes with joy that the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people which were brought together with clarity in the 'Statement from the Heart' may be listened to, heard, and be valued enough to act upon in an enduring Voice.
 - G. Note reservations some hold of the capacity for the Voice to make representations to Executive Government, but also note and place much weight on the preponderance of expert advice that this will not paralyse or undermine the work of government and civil institution.
 - H. We ask the rhetorical question: If the Voice is not able to make representation to the Executive Government how else may practical change be effected?
 - I. Note the capacity the Parliament of the day will have to make laws with respect to the Voice. Noting also that the specific capacity for the Voice to work remains within in the general ambit of the democratic parliamentary process.
8. As Chairs of PAC and NATSIAC respectively we conclude with the strong encouragement to speed the work to enable the Constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First People of Australia, AND that their voice as First People may be preserved and heard through an enduring Voice as is provided for in this Bill. This encouragement applies to those who will prepare the legislation necessary to frame the constitutional alteration, and the Australian people through the forthcoming referendum.

Yours faithfully,

Rt Rev Dr Matt Brain
Chair

Public Affairs Commission
18 April 2023

Rev Canon Assoc Prof Uncle Glenn Loughrey
Chair

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Anglican Council



National Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander
Anglican Council