



MEDIA RELEASE

Indigenous constitutional recognition under the spotlight at Blue Mountains event

14 April 2016

Senior Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander figures will gather in Lawson to discuss the campaign for constitutional reform on Saturday, 30 April 2016.

The NSW Reconciliation Council (NSWRC) event, ***Defining your future: a conversation about constitutional recognition, treaty and sovereignty***, will be an autonomous discussions of the ins, outs, pros and cons of the current movement to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia's Constitution. The first Aboriginal person elected to NSW Parliament, Linda Burney, will be joined on stage by barrister Tim Goodwin, youth activist Clark Donovan, and Aboriginal affairs expert Jody Broun.

"The recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia's Constitution is one of the most significant issues facing Aboriginal communities across the country," said NSWRC Director Gilly Dempsey. "While there is significant support for constitutional recognition as a means of addressing racial discrimination in our country, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have legitimate concerns about the constitutional reform agenda."

Ms Dempsey said she hoped the event would provide members of the Blue Mountains community with some clarity about the key issues at stake in the current debate.

"We know that people have a lot of questions that they want answered before they make a final decision as to whether they will support constitutional reform in a referendum or not. What this forum will do is provide local people with the opportunity to have those questions answered honestly and openly by experts in the field."

The current campaign for constitutional reform aims to pass a series of changes based on recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and removal of sections of the Constitution which currently allow for discrimination on the basis of race. While the precise wording of the proposed measures has yet to be released, the government has previously signalled its intention to hold a referendum on any proposed reforms in May 2017.

Ms Dempsey warned that any constitutional reform must reflect the priorities and concerns of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

"The proper amendment of Australia's Constitution to remove racist clauses and include an acknowledgement of the country's First Peoples would be a significant step forward in Australia's history," she said.

“However, any changes must be informed by the diverse voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The NSW Reconciliation Council is providing a forum in the Blue Mountains where those voices can make themselves heard.”

The New South Wales Reconciliation Council is the peak representative body for reconciliation in NSW. Our vision is to create a reconciled, just and equitable community for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians. Our membership is currently made up of Reconciliation Groups and individuals across NSW – Indigenous and non-Indigenous people working together to advance reconciliation in their communities.

For further information, interview requests or enquiries, please contact Georgia Behrens at georgia.behrens@nswreconciliation.org.au or on (02) 8095 9600.

Event information:

Date: Saturday 30 April, 2016

Time: Panel discussion 12.00pm – 1.00pm
Lunch & group discussion 1.00pm –2.30pm

Location: Mid Mountains Neighbourhood Centre
9 New St, Lawson NSW

The Hon. Linda Burney MP is the NSW Member for Canterbury, and the first Aboriginal person to serve in the New South Wales Parliament. She was previously the New South Wales Deputy Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Minister for Education and Aboriginal Affairs. She was an executive member of the National Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, President of the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group and is a former Director-General of the NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs. She is a member of the Wiradjuri nation.

Tim Goodwin is a barrister from Victoria, with extensive experience in Indigenous community affairs. He has previously worked as a solicitor and as a judge’s associate at the Federal Court of Australia. He completed a Masters of Law at Harvard Law School in 2011-12, studying how constitutional and legal recognition of Indigenous rights can assist in Australian social and economic development. Tim is a member of the Yuin people.

Clark Donovan is a law clerk at Gadens Sydney, currently completing his Bachelor of Laws, Languages and Culture at the University of Technology Sydney. He is the Secretary of the New South Wales Reconciliation Council. Clark is a proud Gumbaynggirr and Gunditjmara man.

Jody Broun is an Aboriginal affairs expert, currently working as the NSW Executive Director of the Australian Red Cross. She has previously worked as Co-Chairperson of the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples, the Director General of the NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs, and Executive Director of Aboriginal Housing and Infrastructure WA. She is also an award-winning visual artist. Jody is a member of the Yindjibarndi people.