

Voice Factsheet

The Uluru Statement from the Heart identifies a First Nations Voice to Parliament as a crucial next step in promoting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders peoples' right to self-determination.

To effect long lasting and systemic change, there must be consultation, partnership and representation that reflects the diverse 250 plus First Nations cultures and language groups across Australia.

A First Nations Voice guaranteed by the Constitution will offer a permanent platform for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices to be heard by Parliament and ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a say in the policy matters that affect their lives.

In order to establish a First Nations Voice in the Constitution this change will have to be passed at a referendum.

The specification that a First Nations Voice be constitutionally protected is an important one. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have extensive experience of fluctuating stability where Indigenous advisory bodies have been created and dissolved due to changes in government and political priorities (for example, the abolition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC)). The Uluru Statement calls for a stable platform, guaranteed by the Constitution for First Nations voices to be heard now and into the future.

The Turnbull government's rejection of the First Nations Voice proposal on the basis that it would create a 'third chamber of Parliament' and infringe on Australia's model of representative government has been discredited by legal experts. There are many similar models of advisory bodies that function to advise Parliament on legislative and policy matters.

Whilst the precise model for the First Nations Voice to Parliament is yet to be determined, current proposals suggest that it will take the form of a representative body that will exercise non-legally binding advisory power in its relationship with Parliament. It is essential that First Nations peoples have self-determination and lead the design, process and execution of a First Nations Voice to Parliament.

The support of the wider Australian public and the momentum that is built through such a process has the potential to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' and communities' voices are heard and their guidance and expertise is followed by governments in regards to Indigenous affairs.

A First Nations Voice to Parliament would ensure that Parliament is better and more appropriately informed in its approach to Indigenous affairs policy and law making.