

The Voice to Parliament

WHAT IS THE VOICE TO PARLIAMENT?

The Voice to Parliament is the first step outlined in the Uluru Statement from the Heart. The steps are Voice, Treaty and Truth. This referendum is about the first step – the Voice.

The Uluru Statement is the largest consensus statement made by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people about how reconciliation and constitutional recognition should be. The Uluru Statement is the culmination of 13 Regional Dialogues covering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities – broad consultation that took place over a couple of years. The Uluru Statement from the Heart is a short but powerful and moving statement.

The Voice to Parliament will provide recognition and permanent representation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Australian Constitution. Having a voice enshrined in the constitution means that governments cannot remove it.

Put simply, the Voice to Parliament will allow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people a say on laws and policies that affect them, which is something they have not had. The Voice is positive, practical and fair.

WHAT WILL THIS MEAN?

The Voice to Parliament will be a new, advisory body representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from across Australia. The Voice will represent and advise on the views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to the Australian Government on decisions, policies and laws that affect their lives.

Matters for advice will relate to the health, housing, education, justice and economic welfare of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Voice is to be an advisory body. It will not have powers to overrule parliament, make laws or function as a separate decision-making body.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people know best what policies and programs will help them and their communities heal, thrive and prosper.

WHY IS THE VOICE TO PARLIAMENT IMPORTANT TO NURSES, MIDWIVES AND CARERS? WHY IS THE ANMF SUPPORTING IT?

The nursing and midwifery professions are founded on compassion for others. Nurses, midwives and carers act to ensure all people regardless of their racial, sexual or religious identities have access to quality, timely and appropriate health care. They are inclusive of both health service users, and of the diverse makeup of the professions themselves.

The ANMF has fairness and equity at its core. We have all worked hard since 1924 to get fair pay and working conditions as well as recognition and respect for nurses, midwives and carers. We want fairness for ourselves, and for others. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to experience discrimination and racism in the health system and in broader society. The ANMF strongly believes this is wrong.

The ANMF Federal Executive declared its national support and endorsed the historic Uluru Statement from the Heart in November 2018. Social justice has always been a pillar of the ANMF's work, and we believe that meaningful consultation via a Voice to Parliament will help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people address the significant issues facing them and their communities around health, housing, education, justice and economic welfare.

It makes sense that nurses, midwives and carers, and the ANMF, support the call from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to be recognised and consulted on the issues affecting them. Fairness, equity and an equal say on the issues that matter is worth fighting for.



WHAT IS A REFERENDUM AND WHY DO AUSTRALIANS NEED TO VOTE?

The Australian Constitution sets out the basic rules of Government. To change the constitution, a referendum must be held to seek the approval of Australian voters. Later this year, all Australians on the electoral role will be asked to vote on the following question:

“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?”

Just like any election, it is compulsory to vote at a referendum. You will be asked to write “Yes” or “No”.

The referendum will need a double majority to pass. This means a national majority of all Australian voters as well as a majority of states (for example 4 of 6 states), need to vote YES for the referendum to succeed. Votes from the Territories go into the national vote.



REST OF THE WORLD

Worldwide, a First Nations Voice has been established in respective constitutions in many countries including New Zealand, Canada, and the United States.

Further, the United Nations supports a First Nations Voice to Parliament, stating, “The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples calls on states to obtain free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous people through their representative institutions before adopting legislative or administrative measures that would affect them; it provides an international framework of best practice for engagement.”

FURTHER INFORMATION

These resources provide the detail, from why to how.

The Voice to Parliament handbook: all the detail you need

Thomas Mayo and Kerry O'Brien. Melbourne: Hardie Grant, 2023.

Please contact the ANMF Federal Office if you are interested in receiving a copy of this publication.

Yes23 - <https://www.yes23.com.au/>

Uluru Statement - <https://ulurustatement.org/education/resources/>

Unions For Yes - <https://yes.ausunions.io/>

