



Referendum Council

MEDIA RELEASE

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CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM MUST LEAD TO REAL CHANGE

Delegates at the seventh First Nations Regional Dialogue have warned that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples will only accept substantive reform, not mere minimalism when it comes to constitutional recognition.

Dialogue Co-convenor Jill Gallagher said, “It was a robust, passionate and ultimately inspiring discussion.”

As in previous Dialogues, Delegates spoke emotively about their views on constitutional reform.

“There are few chances for First Nations people to come together to reflect on our past and talk about our aspirations,” Ms Gallagher explained. “Delegates at the Melbourne Dialogue took the opportunity to discuss their shared history – our hard-fought wins and collective losses – and look forward to the future we want for ourselves, our children and grandchildren.”

Delegates explored the risks and opportunities they see associated with constitutional reform, sovereignty and self-determination.

“We talked about current challenges: the ongoing rate of youth suicide, the injustice of incarceration, the continuing loss of our language and culture. And we asked how constitutional recognition could help address these things, because reform is only worth pursuing if it helps with our day-to-day struggles,” Dialogue Co-convenor Jeremy Clark said.

The Dialogue Co-convenors said they were proud to hear people speak with such strength of conviction and shared commitment to reaching a unified position that results in real change.

The reforms most strongly backed by Delegates included a voice to Parliament, through an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander body that would be able to influence laws and policies that affect First Nations peoples.

During the meeting, Delegates said they look forward to having all Australians take part in a respectful conversation on constitutional reform based on the outcomes from the First Nations Regional Dialogues.

The First Nations Regional Dialogue in Melbourne is one of a series of 12 being held around Australia. The Dialogues culminate in a National Convention in Uluru in May.

About the Referendum Council

The Referendum Council was jointly appointed by the Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and Leader of the Opposition, Bill Shorten on 7 December 2015.

The Referendum Council's job is to advise the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition on progress and next steps towards constitutional reform.

The Regional Dialogues are designed to ensure the views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are heard through this process.

A discussion paper has been released that outlines the main questions for Australians to consider.

All submissions and comments are welcome and can be provided through www.referendumcouncil.org.au

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