



## Referendum Council

### **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **A VOICE TO PARLIAMENT KEY RECOMMENDATION OF REFERENDUM COUNCIL'S FINAL REPORT**

Referendum Council Co-Chairs, Pat Anderson and Mark Leibler welcome the public release of the Council's Final Report and look forward to continuing to work with all political parties and the Australian public to deliver nation-building constitutional reform.

Following what is believed to be the most proportionately significant consultation ever undertaken with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the Final Report of the Referendum Council's makes two main recommendations. These reflect the input the Council received through its First Nations Dialogue process and wider community consultation.

The report recommends a referendum be held to provide in the Australian Constitution for a representative body that gives Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Nations a Voice to Commonwealth Parliament.

"As we travelled around the country, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples made it clear they want substantive reform that makes a real difference to the lives of First Nations peoples," Referendum Council Co-Chair, Pat Anderson explained.

"Enshrining a Voice to Parliament in the Constitution provides certainty that First Nations people will have a greater say in decisions about our lives and the lives of our children."

The design and functions of this body would be set out by legislation. This means Parliament will define how it is set up and how it operates. The Council has proposed that one of the functions of the Voice to Parliament would be monitoring the use of the heads of power in section 51 (xxvi) and section 122.

Ms Anderson said, "The fact a Voice to Parliament emerged as the preferred option should be viewed as a positive, inspiring reflection of people's aspiration for something better, something which is shaped by First Nations peoples for First Nations peoples."

Ms Anderson urged Australians to read the report and emphasised that the recommendations are inextricably linked to the reasoning set out in the Referendum Council's report, including the Uluru Statement From the Heart. "The justification for the recommendations is laid out in the report," she said.

The second recommendation of the report is a Declaration of Recognition to unify Australians that sits outside the Constitution. This would be enacted by legislation passed by all Australian Parliaments.

In addition, there are two other matters of great importance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples the Council has brought to the attention of the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition.

The Uluru Statement called for the establishment of a Makarrata Commission which will supervise agreement-making and facilitate a process of local and regional truth-telling.

Referendum Council Co-Chair, Mark Leibler says that while the Council had been mindful of the inquiries into constitutional recognition that preceded its work, none of those inquiries had consulted as comprehensively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

“We still need to flesh out the details of how a constitutionally enshrined representative body would operate. Some of that detail will need to be resolved before a question is put to the Australian people at a referendum, and much of it could be finalised following a successful referendum.

“However, the detail we already have should be enough for people to embrace the idea as simple, moderate and unifying.

“Simple because it is the only constitutional change on the table.

“Moderate because its structure and functions will be defined by the parliament and therefore its functions are to be designed by all Australians via their democratically elected representatives. There is no suggestion that the body would have power of veto on proposed legislation.

“And unifying because the body itself, and the respectful, inclusive process that has been the backdrop to its creation, has the potential to turn around our dismal record of policy failure in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs.”

“Clear-headed consideration of what we have advocated, and why, will bring Australians of all backgrounds and political persuasions to one conclusion, I believe,” Mr Leibler said.

“As a nation, we either follow the path set out in the Council’s report or we remove constitutional recognition of our First Peoples from the current agenda.

Ms Anderson concluded, “It’s now up to the politicians to decide whether they respect the process we’ve undertaken and will work with us in good faith to advance the recommendations.”

For a full copy of the report, please visit [www.referendumcouncil.org.au](http://www.referendumcouncil.org.au)

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