

## FAQs

### **What is a First Nations Voice?**

The First Nations Voice is the first proposal contained within the Uluru Statement from the Heart. It is a constitutionally protected body of First Nations people which will advise the Federal Parliament and the executive government, able to influence laws and policies at the point they originate.

### **How will a First Nations Voice help communities?**

A Voice will mean the Government will have better quality information about First Nations communities and issues, delivered directly from communities themselves. Information from communities will result in better quality laws and policies, better targeted investment and ultimately better outcomes for First Nations people across many sectors.

### **What is the Uluru Statement From the Heart and how is it linked to the Voice?**

The Uluru Statement from the Heart is the culmination of 13 Regional Dialogues with First Nations people which arrived at a consensus about what constitutional recognition should look like. The Statement is an invitation from First Nations people to all Australians. One of its key features is to ask Australians to support meaningful constitutional recognition through providing a First Nations Voice.

### **What shape would a First Nations Voice take?**

The referendum will ask Australians if they agree with the principle that First Nations people should have a seat at the table when decisions are being made about their lives. The exact shape will be determined by the parliament following a successful referendum. This allows for the shape to be changed by parliaments over time according to the conditions of the day. Put simply, the constitution is for the principles, the concept. The parliament is for the shape, the bricks and mortar.

### **When would a referendum be?**

The Albanese government has committed to a referendum in the second half of 2023.

### **How will it happen**

The Government will introduce a bill in parliament to allow a referendum. If the bill passes both houses of parliament, a date will then be set, the question on the ballot paper finalised, and an education program will commence to make sure Australians are fully informed. All Australians over 18 will vote.

### **Why do we need to change the Constitution? Why can't it be an ordinary act of parliament?**

Since 1967 federal governments have required a mechanism like a voice to support its work in the Indigenous policy space. The government needs to know who to talk to on issues that affect First Nations people. Each of the five previous mechanisms which have been set up by parliamentary processes for this purpose have been abolished by successive governments cancelling programs, policies and investment with the stroke of a pen. This chopping and changing according to election cycles has contributed to the ongoing disadvantage experienced by many First Nations people. If the Voice was enshrined in the Constitution, it could not be abolished without significant public scrutiny, giving the government of the day a strong incentive to work with First Nations people and ensure their advice and input is heard.

### **Do First Nations Peoples support this Voice?**

Yes. Independent Research undertaken in January 2023 shows 80% of First Nations people support the Voice.

### **Why is the sequence Voice, then Treaty and Truth?**

We're starting with the 'big law' - the Constitution is the highest law in the land. This is the best way for us to ensure tangible outcomes to improve the lives of First Nations peoples.

### **Do other countries have mechanisms like the proposed Voice?**

Similar mechanisms are common in liberal democracies as they are a way to ensure Indigenous peoples, who often make up only a small percentage of the population, are able to actively participate in decision making regarding the policies and laws that affect them.

### **Why is the Voice needed when there are already First Nations members of parliament?**

First Nations members of parliament are elected to represent their electorates – this is the fundamental basis of our representative democracy. They speak for their constituents and represent the political party under which they are elected. Those who participated in the Regional Dialogues do not want to join political parties, they do not want to be politicians. They devote their lives to improving outcomes in their communities and they just want a say in matters that impact them.

### **What did the Uluru Statement say about sovereignty?**

The Uluru Statement says that First Nations' sovereignty was never ceded and coexists with the Crown's sovereignty today, that sovereignty comes from a different source to the sovereignty claimed by the Crown, from the ancestral tie between the land and its people. The Uluru Statement calls for this ancient sovereignty to be recognised through structural reform including constitutional change. Enshrining a First Nations Voice is recognition of First Nations' sovereignty and First Nations' rights based on their unique political and cultural existence. Simply, sovereignty is not undermined nor diminished by the Voice.