

**Open letter to federal parliamentarians
on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice referendum**

Wednesday 22 February 2023

As leaders of Australia's major religious and ethno-religious organisations, we call on Australia's political leaders and all federal parliamentarians to support the Voice, called for by First Nations Australians through the Uluru Statement from the Heart. Unlike Canada, the United States and New Zealand, Australia has no formal bilateral arrangements in place with First Nations people, a state of affairs that is incompatible with our vision of Australia as a place of fairness for all.

We call on parliamentarians to find ways to collaborate constructively across political divides to achieve the modest constitutional recognition First Nations people seek: a constitutionally guaranteed Voice in their own affairs.

The Voice is an invitation to move towards national healing, unity and reconciliation. It seeks to formalise in our Constitution a way by which First Nations' voices and concerns can be heard, and to establish a means for overcoming the devastating effects of social exclusion. This is an opportunity to unite Australians around a proposal that seeks to make life better for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Last year, we came together on the fifth anniversary of the Uluru Statement from the Heart to issue a Joint Resolution to encourage Australians to support this change:

Joint Resolution on the Uluru Statement from the Heart

On this day in 2017, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples came together at Uluru and asked Australians to walk with them towards a better future.

Through the Uluru Statement from the Heart, Indigenous Australians asked for constitutional recognition through a constitutionally guaranteed voice in their own affairs.

As leaders representing diverse religious communities, we declare our support of the Uluru Statement and its call for a First Nations Voice guaranteed by the Constitution.

We endorse this reform as necessary, right and reasonable.

Indigenous Australians must be now afforded their rightful place in the Australian Constitution. There have been many processes and much work completed. The one thing left to do is let the Australian people have their say.

We call on political leaders to take immediate bipartisan action to hold a referendum on a First Nations voice.

We draw upon our diverse traditions, beliefs and cultures to unite in support of this just cause. We respectfully ask our political representatives to do the same. We call on our fellow Australians to consider the Voice proposal on its merits, and for whatever information is needed to inform the community to be supplied promptly. Future generations of Australians will not forgive us if we fail to grasp the historical moment, and 'advance Australia' further along the path of justice.

Whatever our disagreements, let us work together to resolve them. The Voice referendum deserves cross-party co-operation. If we work together across political divides, the referendum will succeed, and we will have put Australia on both a moral and practical path to reconciliation.

Signed,



Bishop Chris McLeod
National Aboriginal Bishop
Anglican Church of Australia



Bishop Charles Gauci
Chair, Bishops Commission for Relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander Peoples
Australian Catholic Bishops Conference



Dr Ibrahim Abu Mohamad
Grand Mufti of Australia
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Ven. Tenpa Bejanke
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Ms Jillian Segal AO
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National Council of
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Reverend John Gilmore
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Uniting Church in Australia
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Reverend Sharon Hollis
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