



*Uniting Aboriginal & Islander
Christian Congress*



*Uniting Church in Australia
Assembly*

Submission to the Inquiry into the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice Referendum

April 2023



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About the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress

The Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) is Aboriginal and Islander Christians from all over Australia who have come together to form a National Congress, the result of a vision developed through a series of gatherings in the early 1980's. The aim of the UAICC, in collaboration with other people, is to bring to an end the injustices which hold Aboriginal and Islander People at the fringes of Australian society and to help Aboriginal and Islander People achieve spiritual, economic, social and cultural independence.

Acknowledging the difficult history of this nation, and our part in the colonisation of First Nations People, the Uniting Church formally [entered into a Covenant relationship](#) with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress in 1994, an ever deepening commitment to seek a fuller expression our reconciliation in Jesus Christ.

About UnitingCare Australia

UnitingCare Australia is the national body for the Uniting Church's community services network and is an agency of the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia. We give voice to the Uniting Church's commitment to social justice through advocacy and by strengthening community service provisions.

We are the largest network of social service providers in Australia, supporting 1.4 million people very year across urban, rural, and remote communities.

We focus on articulating and meeting the needs of people at all stages of life and those that are most vulnerable.

The Uniting Aboriginal and Island Christian Congress (UAICC), the Uniting Church in Australia and UnitingCare Australia welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Joint Select Committee's Inquiry into the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice Referendum. Our collaboration reflects the Church's Covenant with the UAICC which articulates its desire to work in solidarity towards national policy changes and build relationships that respect the rights of First Nations People to self-determination¹.

We support the wording in the proposed Constitutional Alteration (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice) Bill 2023 and recognise it as a first step towards the full implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart (Uluru Statement) which called for three components: Voice, Treaty, Truth. We commend the Federal Government for committing to the full implementation of the Uluru Statement.

The Uniting Church Assembly Standing Committee (ASC) resolved at its recent meeting to declare the support of the Uniting Church in Australia for the proposed change in the Australian Constitution to recognise an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament. The ASC noted this decision was informed by the Uniting Church's commitment to the Covenant between the Uniting Church and the UAICC².

The UAICC, the Uniting Church and UnitingCare Australia support the full implementation of the Uluru Statement because:

- First Nations People and their culture need to be understood and celebrated by all people in Australia,
- First Nations People have given us the Uluru Statement as the basis for reconciliation,
- It calls for the acknowledgement of the sovereignty of First Nations People in Australia,
- It highlights the need for self-determination which gives First Nations People an opportunity to shape decisions impacting their lives, communities, Country and cultural sites,

¹ [Uniting Church Covenanting Statement 1994](#)

² [Uniting Church Assembly Standing Committee March 2023 Resolution](#)

- It seeks a constitutionally enshrined First Nations Voice, as well as systemic changes, that will significantly affect positive life outcomes for First Nations People, and
- It seeks recognition of Australia's true history and the ongoing impacts of trauma on First Nations families and communities.

As the largest network of community service providers in the country, the UnitingCare network sees the overrepresentation of First Nations People accessing support services and recognises the poor outcomes being achieved against the Closing the Gap measures. Providing First Nations People with a Voice in the solutions that work on the ground will be key to improving the lives of First Nations People in Australia.

We urge the Committee to recommend the Bill be passed in its entirety.