

30 April 2021

## **From The Heart: Supporting a Voice to Parliament enshrined in the Australian constitution.**

The call from the **Uluru Statement from the Heart** for a Voice to a Parliament enshrined in the Australian constitution provides a path to address the issues of inequity, disadvantage and disenfranchisement that impact on the First Nations people of our country.

A Voice to Parliament provides the foundation for better outcomes for First Nations people. They are the ones that have the best understanding of the challenges facing their families and communities. They know the strengths of their communities and what can be achieved when they are involved in designing programs and services meant for them.

A Voice to Parliament will empower First Nations people, allowing them to take ownership and responsibility for the challenges that they face, and work constructively with governments from any political party to partner deeply with First Nations people to build a stronger future together.

### **Uluru Statement from the Heart Workshop.**

On 14 April 2021, 29 employees of Uniting WA gathered for a 90-minute workshop to discuss the issues that are addressed and as yet not enacted in response to the **Uluru Statement from the Heart**. The purpose of the workshop was to review the **Uluru Statement from the Heart** and understand its purpose and significance, in order to understand the actions we can take individually and collectively to support the **Uluru Statement from the Heart**.

The internally-facilitated workshop gathered feedback on the 3 key submission points to support a Voice protected in the Constitution:

1. The Government must honour its election commitment to a referendum once a model for the Voice has been settled
2. Enabling legislation for the Voice must be passed after a referendum has been held in the next term of Parliament\*

*\*For the avoidance of doubt, the National Voice must not be legislated or otherwise implemented before a referendum has been held*

3. The membership model for the National Voice must ensure previously unheard Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the same chance of being selected as established leadership figures.

The summarised workshop outcomes are reflected here, in Uniting WA's submission supporting the **Uluru Statement from the Heart**.

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Uniting WA respectfully acknowledges the Noongar people as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we provide our services. We recognise their unique and spiritual connection to Country and waters. We value the oldest continuing culture in the world and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

## Supporting a Voice protected in the constitution.

### 1. The Government must honour its election commitment to a referendum once a model for the Voice has been settled.

A referendum will *and* must:

- Seek and obtain acknowledgement from the broader Australian population about the importance of protecting a Voice for First Nations people in the constitution
- Provide clarity about the question Australians are asked to consider and why it is necessary
- Be communicated in language/s accessible to all Australians – plain English, and other languages as necessary with tools for interpretation, such as infographics
- Be free of media and political bias
- Occur within a set timeframe
- Consider the different perspectives of people who will be voting: socio-economic, age/generation, minority or majority background
- Understand the relevance of actual, potential and/or perceived issues to different ‘interest’ groups
- Recognise that this is a correction of course for Australia – an opportunity to provide a contemporary approach to how we recognise, respect and value the First Nations people of our country
- Educate Australians about the truth of our colonial history and the positive impact of our recognition of this for First Nations people
- Realise that giving First Nations people a Voice does not take away the voice of anyone else.

### 2. Enabling legislation for the Voice must be passed after a referendum has been held in the next term of Parliament.

Confirming the protection of Voice with legislation will:

- Affirm the importance of self-determination as a human right
- Clarify the protection of Voice in the spirit of the law
- Define the scope and scale of Voice in the letter of the law.

### 3. The membership model for the National Voice must ensure previously unheard Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the same chance of being selected as established leadership figures.

Enabling First Nations people to determine the membership model will:

- Value Aboriginal governance models
- Incorporate representation from around Australia across all language groups as determined by First Nations people
- Enable decision-making by First Nations people
- Demonstrate learning from past efforts/ mistakes of successive governments.

## Who we are.

We are Uniting WA, a community services organisation operating on Noongar boodja, in the Perth metropolitan and south-west regions of Western Australia. Our purpose is to inspire people, enliven communities and confront injustice. We believe the addition of Voice, enshrined within our constitution, will make way for revolutionary changes to the lives of thousands of First Nations people who have been disadvantaged and traumatised by the colonisation of their country. We support the **Uluru Statement from the Heart**.