



HISTORY IS CALLING

Oxfam supports an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament

Faqs

What is the Voice of Parliament?

The Voice to Parliament is a constitutionally enshrined body of First Nations people which will give advice to the Federal Parliament and executive government on laws and policies that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Voice would provide permanent representation and recognition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Constitution.

The Voice is only there to provide advice. It would not deliver services, manage government funding or mediate between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

It is the first proposal contained within the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

How will a Voice of Parliament help First Nations communities?

A Voice to Parliament will mean that the real experts in communities – grassroots First Nations people – can give advice to Parliament and the government about issues that affect their families and communities.

This way we can finally close the gap and deliver practical change for First Nations communities.

What is the Uluru Statement from the Heart?

In May 2017, after a series of regional dialogues held around Australia, over 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Delegates gathered and put their signatures on a historic statement. The Uluru Statement from the Heart is an invitation to the Australian people to create a better future. One of its key proposals is to provide meaningful

constitutional recognition of First Nations people with a First Nations Voice to Parliament.

You can read the statement in full here: <https://ulurustatement.org/the-statement/view-the-statement/>

What is the Voice to Parliament referendum question I'll be voting on?

The referendum will ask the Australian people to vote YES or no to this referendum question: "A Proposed Law: to alter the Constitution to recognise the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice. Do you approve this proposed alteration?"

To approve this change, Australian voters write the answer 'YES' to the question when voting.

What happens if the Voice to Parliament referendum is unsuccessful?

If the referendum fails, then the constitution will remain unchanged.

Right now, First Nations communities need better access to housing, services and healthcare. The status quo isn't working and we need a Voice to make things better.

When will the Voice to Parliament referendum be held?

In the second half of 2023.

What are the details on how the Voice to Parliament will work?

Working out the details of the Voice to Parliament will involve a comprehensive consultation process. It makes sense to only start the process if the referendum is successful.

Voters won't be asked to decide on a model or details. Parliament will finalise the details of the Voice after the referendum and that is exactly how it should happen. We are confident the Australian people will understand what is being asked of them – and that they will vote YES.

Why do we need to change the Constitution to include a Voice to Parliament?

Enshrining the Voice in the constitution stops future governments from making a political decision to remove it and protects the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The last five mechanisms similar to the Voice have been abolished by successive governments which have led to the cancellation of key programs, policies and investments.

This has contributed to the ongoing disadvantage experienced by many First Nations people.

Why do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples need their own voice? Is the Voice to Parliament a third chamber of parliament?

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the First Peoples of the Australian continent and have the right to self-determination. If laws are to be made that affect them, they should be consulted first. Our existing democratic processes are not ensuring this happens as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples represent only 3% of the population, they don't get an adequate say during elections about policies that directly affect them.

An enshrined First Nations voice in the constitution will simply ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a body that will advise on laws that affect them.

Don't some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples disagree with a Voice to Parliament?

Just like any community there is a diversity of opinion. An Ipsos poll shows 80% of First Nations people support the Voice.

Oxfam Australia supports the referendum for a First Nations Voice and all the recommendations from the Uluru Statement from the Heart including truth telling and treaty.

Why a voice and not treaty or truth telling first?

The Australian Government has chosen to proceed with constitutional recognition and a voice to parliament first. Whether we agree with the order or not, we now have an opportunity to enshrine a First Nations voice in our constitution that we must take. We cannot let this fail and set back progress towards justice and reconciliation.

We must use the opportunity presented by the public focus on Voice to build the momentum and pressure for Truth-Telling and Treaty as well. The Voice is a steppingstone, not the end point, and we can build community support for all elements in the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

The Federal Government is not alone in responding to the calls for Voice, Truth and Treaty. This is a movement sweeping the nation.

In Victoria, a treaty process is well underway. A voice – the First Peoples Assembly of Victoria – was elected in 2019 and is now finalising the treaty framework so that negotiations on treaties can begin with the Victorian Government. In 2021 the Yoorrook Justice Commission was established to investigate the truth of the injustices experienced by First Nations people in Victoria.

Pathways to treaty, truth and voice are also occurring in the Northern Territory, South Australia, Tasmania and Queensland. Queensland has introduced legislation to create a Truth-Telling Commission and First Nations Treaty Institute. The Northern Territory Treaty Commission has advised on the path to voice, truth telling, and treaty. Tasmania has just established an Aboriginal advisory body for truth-telling and treaty. The South Australian Government has committed to a treaty process and introduced legislation in February 2023 for a Voice to their parliament.

Why is Oxfam supporting the YES campaign for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament?

Oxfam Australia has worked to advance First Peoples' rights for more than 50 years. We were a founding member of the Close the Gap alliance in 2007 and continue today to work towards a world where First Nations Peoples have achieved self-determination and their human and cultural rights are fully realised.

For Oxfam that means ensuring First Peoples are supported to lead the way on addressing the causes of disadvantage, inequality and injustice in their own communities, and in our legislation and laws that affect them. These communities know best about the solutions needed to grow the wellbeing, prosperity and empowerment of their communities.

Voice is another way of describing representation, and we believe this is vitally important for First Nations people after centuries of dispossession and marginalisation. Representation is an essential step towards reconciliation and will ensure First Nations communities can advise decision makers on issues that affect their communities. Thus, Oxfam will be a leading voice supporting the YES campaign.

Does Oxfam support the Uluru Statement from the Heart?

Oxfam supports implementing the Uluru Statement from the Heart in full. That means supporting establishing a voice, a truth-telling commission about the injustices faced by First Nations people, and a treaty between Australian Governments and First Peoples.

Australia is one of the few Commonwealth countries without a treaty with the First Peoples of the land. New Zealand has had one since 1840. Canada and the United States began making treaties in the 1700s and this process continues today. This is the unfinished business of Australia and treaty has been called for by First Nations people for decades.

Oxfam's support for Voice, Truth and Treaty is reflected throughout our work, policies and advocacy. Oxfam has advocated for a Treaty process in submissions to government inquiries since 2000.

Where can I find more resources?

<https://ulurustatement.org/>

<https://yes23.com.au/>

<https://togetheryes.com.au/>

<https://antar.org.au/issues/voice/pledge/>

<https://voice.gov.au/>

To find out more about Oxfam Australia's work for First Peoples Justice, [click here](#).