



ANMF

**Australian
Nursing &
Midwifery
Federation**

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The Voice to Parliament Referendum

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

We get it. You have other stuff going on and you've heard a lot of competing ideas about the Voice.

There are some people who want you to believe the Voice is too complex for you to understand. **Yeah, nah.**

You've got this! Have a read so you're prepared the next time someone tries to bamboozle you.



What is the Voice to Parliament?

The Voice to Parliament stems from the very simple idea that everyone deserves a meaningful say over the issues that affect their daily lives.

An “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice” would be a group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, elected by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, to consider new laws that would affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Voice would then provide advice back to parliament.

When we take advice from other people with different perspectives, we can often find better solutions. The Parliament would not have to always agree with the Voice or act on the Voice’s advice, but the Voice will be able to make recommendations for Parliament to consider.

In other words, our country will benefit from the insight and knowledge of the world’s oldest living culture.



Where did this idea come from?

In 2017, over 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders met to consider options for potential changes to the constitution to formally recognise Australia's first peoples.

243 of these 250 leaders agreed, in the 'Uluru Statement from the Heart', to call for the establishment of a 'First Nations Voice' in the Australian Constitution. The Uluru Statement called for Voice, Treaty, and Truth.

How will the referendum work?

Later this year, all Australians on the electoral roll will be asked vote on the following 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?

Just like a regular election, it is compulsory to cast a vote at a referendum. The voting process will be similar to last year's federal election.

You will be asked to write "Yes" or "No".

What is the constitution?




The Constitution of Australia is like the basic rules of Government.

The Constitution establishes the composition of the Australian Parliament, describes how Parliament works and what powers it has. It also outlines how the federal and state Parliaments share power, and the roles of the executive government and the High Court of Australia. It took effect on 1 January 1901.

The constitution has been changed eight times since then. The constitution can only be changed by a referendum – a vote of everyone in Australia.

A national majority of all Australian voters, as well as a majority of states (but not territories) need to vote **YES** for the referendum to succeed.




Why does the Voice need to be in the Constitution?

For too long, Governments have created – but then defunded, silenced and abolished - different bodies intended to represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' wishes. Because these bodies were legislated by the Parliament, Parliament could easily legislate them away.


But if the Australian people collectively demand an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice embedded in the Constitution, only we, the Australian people, can remove it.

Parliament will still be able to make changes to the form and function of the body through legislation if they need to, but the only way they can remove the Voice entirely will be through another referendum.



Why do we need this at all?

The Uluru Statement from the Heart puts it best:



Proportionally, we are the most incarcerated people on the planet. We are not an innately criminal people. Our children are alienated from their families at unprecedented rates. This cannot be because we have no love for them. And our youth languish in detention in obscene numbers. They should be our hope for the future.

These dimensions of our crisis tell plainly the structural nature of our problem. This is the torment of our powerlessness.

We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a rightful place in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.

Doesn't this just divide Australians?

Refusing to talk about inequalities doesn't erase them. We have to be courageous and honest with ourselves about the ways our country can do better.

When Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live shorter lives with worse health outcomes, get paid lower wages, live in communities deprived of decent infrastructure and are obstructed in their access to education, we are ALREADY a nation divided.

All of this has happened on the watch of politicians who have spent generations insisting they know better than the people affected by their decisions.

All of us deserve equality, and the chance to really be heard by the people making the laws that affect our lives. By asking us to support the Voice to Parliament, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are extending an invitation to all Australians to help them be heard too – because clearly, governments don't have all the answers.

But aren't Aboriginal people represented in Parliament already?

An electorate may choose an Aboriginal MP, but Aboriginal communities don't currently have the power to elect someone to represent them.

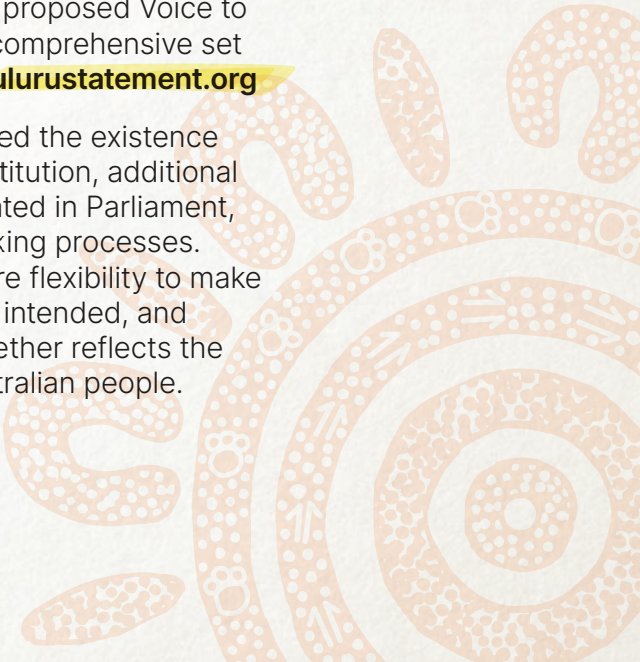
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up only 3% of the Australian population, and are a minority in nearly every electorate in Australia. **Politicians follow votes – and Aboriginal votes are too often ignored in deference to bigger or more powerful groups.**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will continue to be able to vote for their local, state and federal government representatives just like everyone else. They will also be invited to elect representatives to the Voice, who will advise the Parliament.


Why isn't there more detail?

There is ample information publicly available to make an informed choice about what we can expect from the proposed Voice to Parliament, including a comprehensive set of guiding principles at [ulurustatement.org](https://www.ulurustatement.org)

Once we have established the existence of the Voice in the Constitution, additional finer details will be debated in Parliament, through regular law-making processes. This gives everyone more flexibility to make sure the Voice works as intended, and that the way it's put together reflects the expectations of the Australian people.







What about Aboriginal people who oppose it?

Aboriginal communities are diverse, and it's not surprising that there are different priorities and different views within Aboriginal communities.

However, poll after poll indicates that over 80% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people support the Voice, and are inviting you to support it too.

Ultimately, if the Voice succeeds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can choose how much they will participate in Voice processes.

How will this actually improve things for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?

We all want to see practical solutions for Aboriginal people, but nothing happens overnight.

Embedding a Voice in the constitution will empower Aboriginal communities to determine better outcomes by having a direct say on what really works, based on their own lived experience.

With a strong representative Voice providing advice, the government will have better information and more accurate insights, which will in turn mean they are better able to respond to the various needs of different communities with better laws.

The Voice is a simple, practical step in the right direction.

Hmmm, I still have questions...

No worries, here are some resources that might help!

Australian Electoral Commission:
aec.gov.au/referendums

Law Council of Australia advice:
lawcouncil.asn.au

YES 23 website:
yes23.com.au

Or ask your question at:
weareunion.org.au/voiceqanda

ANMF Voice resources:
anmfvic.asn.au/yestovoice23

Uluru Statement from the Heart:
ulurustatement.org



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