



OLSH Hearts for Others



WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH THE VOICE REFERENDUM?

When will it be?

We don't yet know the date of the referendum, but it must be held between two and six months from 19th June, when laws about the wording of the question and the amendment to the Constitution were passed. Many believe that a Saturday in October is the most likely time.

What is the referendum question?

The question posed to all Australians will be:

“*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?”

The concept of a Voice grew from years of discussion among many hundreds of Indigenous Australians about recognising First Nations peoples in the Constitution, and was cemented during the National Constitutional Convention at Uluru in 2017 when over 250 delegates issued the Uluru Statement from the Heart, in which they called for “constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a rightful place in our own country.” At present, all state and territory governments in Australia support the Voice, but some recent polling shows popular support for the Voice is slipping.

What would the Voice be able to do?

If formed, the Voice would be an advisory body to give First Nations peoples a say in government policy and programs that affect their lives. Its existence in the Constitution, rather than simply in law, would insulate it from any attempt to disband it. Specifically, the Voice would provide advice to the Federal Parliament about laws and policies, through a consultative policy making process that delivers meaningful structural change. The Voice would not have





the power to veto government decisions or to prevent the passing of legislation. Nor would it have power to make representations on matters that are unrelated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

What is not yet known about the Voice?

If the Voice referendum succeeds, parliament will decide the details: how the Voice interacts with it and the executive, how consultation is organised, how representations are made, and what information the Voice could request or be given, for example.

The First Nations referendum working group advising the government on the design of the Voice has provided information on how it could work: providing independent advice, chosen by First Nations people based on the wishes of local communities, drawing on regional and national representatives, for example. The Voice's structure would also be likely to come from the 2021 Calma-Langton report (final report from the Indigenous Voice Co-design Process, co-authored by Tom Calma and Marcia Langton), which recommended how members could be chosen to represent local, regional and national Indigenous interests. In a speech at the National Press Club on 5th July, Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Linda Burney, stated that the first priorities of the Voice would be health, education, housing and employment.

The campaign from here

A date will be set, then voters will be sent pamphlets by the Australian Electoral Commission containing arguments written by senators and MPs both for and against a Voice to Parliament. We can expect misinformation, as Australia does not have federal truth in political advertising laws.

(All references above from: yes23.com.au and SMH, July 2nd 2023)



How can constitutional reform advance Reconciliation?

The push for constitutional reform is not about giving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples more rights, or advantaging them over the rest of the community. It's about recognising their special place in the history of the nation and improving their well-being, both as individuals, communities and as part of the national identity.

The Constitution was drafted at a time when Australia was considered a land that belonged to no one before European settlement and when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were considered a 'dying race' not worthy of citizenship or humanity. They were excluded from the discussions about the creation of a new nation to be situated on their Ancestral lands and waters. In essence, constitutional reform is about reconciling our past, building a solid foundation for the Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationship and looking ahead to a collective future. (Australian Human Rights Commission 2023)

IF NOT NOW, WHEN?

