



Indigenous Voice Discussion Paper

Australian Historical Association Submission.

The Australian Historical Association (AHA) is the peak national body of historians which includes academic, professional and other historians working in all fields of history. The AHA currently has over 700 members ranging from established scholars, to mid-career, early career historians, and to students. The AHA hosts an annual conference and runs the journal *History Australia* which is published four times a year. We offer the strong support and commitment of our organisation to the crucial role of history in our national life that is envisaged in the Uluru Statement.

Response to the Indigenous Voice Discussion Paper

In solidarity with the First Peoples of Australia, the Australian Historical Association calls on the Federal Government to take immediate steps to adopt the Uluru Statement From the Heart: the most eloquent, generous and significant public statement of any kind in modern Australian history. In particular, we call for the adoption of its proposal for a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament.

As the national organisation representing the historical profession in this country, we give our unequivocal support to the proposals articulated in the Statement – a call for Voice, Treaty and Truth – and have been disappointed by a process which has sought to separate design of the Voice from the Uluru Statement. We call on the government to hold a constitutional referendum once a model for a Voice that is inclusive and welcoming of the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has been agreed.

Members of the AHA teach and write about the histories of many nations and peoples. We are conscious that few moments arise in the history of any country in which there are genuine opportunities for a shared sense of belonging that, at the same time, recognises and respects the differences that are an inevitable inheritance of our history as a settler nation.

There has been a long history of Indigenous advocacy and forbearance in this country – more than two centuries of patient petitioning of colonial, state and federal politicians and their institutions by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Tragically, those statements and processes of consultation have too often been betrayed or undermined by government, to the great cost of the Australian community and especially of First Nations people themselves.

Historical research in recent decades has helped reveal something of the depth of First Nations people's pain and the failures of imagination and justice that have given rise to it. The Uluru Statement, which is the result of a decade of consultation initiated by the federal government, continues to present us with a vital opportunity for richer mutual understanding as well as for a constitution that better reflects both the complexities of our history and our identity.

A constitutional enshrined Voice would be a modest reform that respects the sovereignty of the Australian Parliament. Indigenous leaders have calmly reiterated that it is a voice, not a veto; it is a voice *to* parliament not a voice *in* parliament. We strongly support the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution because it is only in the context of the nation's foundational document that it can receive the respect from all sections of the community that it thoroughly deserves.