

The referendum on constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through a Voice to Parliament



Bishop Cam Venables

Dear sisters and brothers,

The bishops of the Anglican Church in Australia met two weeks ago in Hobart. One of the key matters we discussed was the forthcoming referendum about the proposed constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through a Voice to Parliament.

The Chair of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Anglican Council (NATSIAC), The Rev'd Canon Glenn Loughrey, explained that the proposal emerged from a very significant consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community representatives between 2016 and 2017.

Canon Glenn invited all bishops to support the Voice to Parliament and encourage their clergy and people to be informed about the potential this has to progress and reframe the work of Reconciliation within Australia.

The following is an extract from an agreed statement from the meeting issued by the Primate, Archbishop Geoff Smith:

*"In 2017 the General Synod expressed its support for a "constitutionally-entrenched First Nations' Voice to the Commonwealth Parliament". We are thankful that Bishop Chris McLeod, the National Aboriginal Bishop, has signed an [endorsement](#) of the Statement from the Heart with other faith leaders in 2023. **We are prayerfully committed to reconciliation and to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices being***

heard in the life of our nation. We urge all Australians to engage seriously with the referendum question about constitutional recognition."

Last year's Diocesan Synod affirmed the ongoing work of our Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), which encourages the fostering of positive relationships at a local level.

The work of Reconciliation is not just local, there are inevitable implications for us nationally, which is one reason why our [Diocesan RAP](#) supports the Uluru Statement From the Heart, including the Voice to Parliament.

I think supporting the Voice to Parliament is well grounded in the third element of our Diocesan Mission statement in which we, *"...seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation."*

Congruent with this, the Diocesan Council voted to officially partner with From the Heart, the national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament referendum campaign organisation. The ACSQ was [the first national church](#) to do this.

Our RAP Working Group Chair, The Rev'd Canon Bruce Boase, has said that, *"...the Uluru Statement from the Heart is a gift for all Australians – a roadmap to fairness."* And, *"...by voting 'yes' Australians will take another meaningful step towards Reconciliation because Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples will then be properly heard on matters that directly concern them."*

I think the Voice will help to engage with complex and systemic issues and will help to "close the gap" that exists in so many ways, particularly in health and life expectancy. Powerfully, this has been suggested and offered to us as a way forward by significant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership...and in this there is both grace and gift.

For more information, there are excellent resources available, and I particularly recommend:

- A series of *anglican focus* "[Why I am voting 'yes' in the referendum](#)" reflections.
- Yes 23 campaign [messaging guide](#).
- Yes 23 campaign [resources](#), including flyers, posters and social media banners
- Anglican Board of Mission [resources page](#).

There will be a [free online workshop](#) on Friday 21 April for clergy and lay people in leadership roles, who are engaged in written and verbal communications, that will explore how to effectively communicate the ACSQ's position on the Voice in homilies, newsletters and social media. The workshop is being co-hosted by St John's Cathedral, the Diocesan Justice Unit, and *anglican focus*.

If you have any questions about the April workshop, please [email](#) RAP Working Group member Michelle McDonald.

God's blessing to each of you in the coming journey of Holy Week.

Yours in Christ,

The Right Reverend Cam Venables
Bishop Administrator