



**Edmund Rice Centre**  
for Justice & Community Education

**PREPARING**

# **FOR THE VOICE**



**An introduction to the  
upcoming Referendum**

**In 2023, the Australian people will vote in a Referendum on whether to recognise First Nations Australians in the Constitution through the creation of a First Nations Voice to Parliament. This is a historic opportunity to create a better future for our country. It is vital that we all understand the proposal when it comes to deciding the path we take together as a nation.**

**Your Vote, My Vote,  
All Votes Count!**

# WHAT IS THE VOICE TO PARLIAMENT?

At the end of 2023, a **Referendum** will be held across Australia. This Referendum will ask **all Australians of voting age** whether the **Australian Constitution** should be amended to recognise **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples** through the creation of a **Voice to Parliament**.

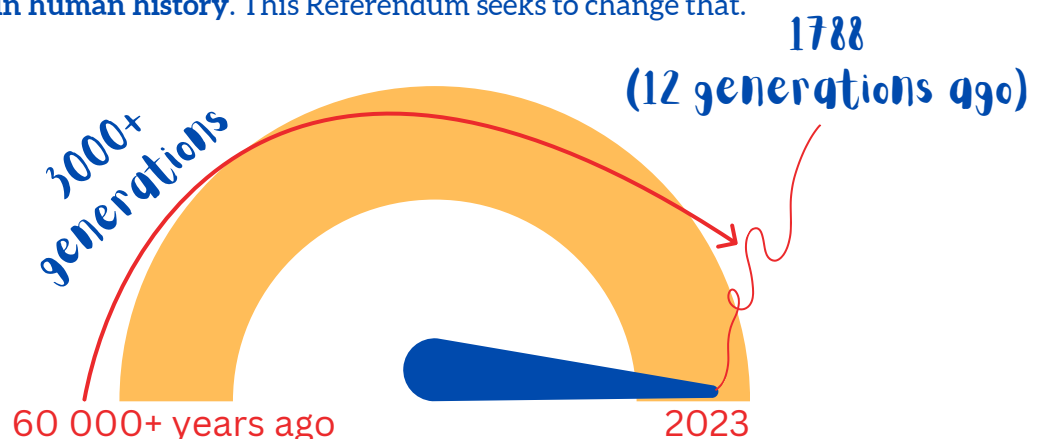
The Voice will be an advisory body. It will be a **platform to represent and amplify** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices. It will enable them to make **representations directly to the Federal Parliament** and the government **on laws and policies that** are likely to **affect them** and their communities.

First Nations peoples have experienced **profound and continuing dispossession and disadvantage** as a **result of British colonisation**. The aim of the Voice is for First Nations voices to be heard more clearly in Canberra, so that **better laws and outcomes** can be achieved for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on issues such as **education, health, housing, criminal justice and employment**.

It will be up to Parliament to decide if the advice of the Voice should be followed. **Parliament will decide how the Voice will work** in practice – who can sit on it, how its representations will be made, and what effect they will have, etc. – by passing legislation if the Referendum is successful. The Referendum is only about the principle of whether there should be a Voice to Parliament. **The Voice will not have a veto** over legislation or decisions of government.

Most importantly, **the purpose of the Referendum is also to recognise Australia's First Nations peoples in the Constitution**. Written without consulting First Nations Australians, our Constitution does not recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples despite their **occupation of the Australian continent for over 60,000 years**. Not once does our Constitution acknowledge First Nation Australians as **the oldest continuing culture in human history**. This Referendum seeks to change that.

To put **time** into context, **First Nations Australians** have been in Australia for over **3,000 generations**; **non-Indigenous Australians** have only been here since 1788, for just **under 12 generations**.



"We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future."

Uluru Statement From the Heart

# HOW DOES A REFERENDUM WORK?

All Australians own the Constitution. The only way that the Constitution can be changed is by holding a **referendum**. For a referendum to succeed, **the proposed alteration to the Constitution must be approved** by a 'double majority'. This means:

- a national majority of voters across Australia; and
- a majority of voters in a majority of the States (i.e., at least four out of six States).

It is **compulsory** for all Australian citizens aged 18 and older to vote in a Referendum. If you are already on the electoral roll, you do not need to enrol again. If you are unsure - check your enrolment status at <https://check.aec.gov.au/>.

The **Referendum for the First Nations Voice to Parliament** is likely to be held in **October 2023**, though the date is yet to be confirmed. Voters will be asked to write 'yes' or 'no'. The Referendum question will look like this:

## 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?



More information on how a Referendum works can be found at <https://aec.gov.au/Elections/referendums/index.htm>.

The proposed words to be added to the Constitution can be found at <https://voice.gov.au/referendum-2023>.

Remember to look out for your First Nations friends!



Remember to **look out for your Indigenous friends, colleagues and students** as we go through the Referendum process this year. Check in with them to see how they are going. It is important for them to know that **they are valued and supported** regardless of what happens with the Referendum.



# LISTENING TO THE VOICE

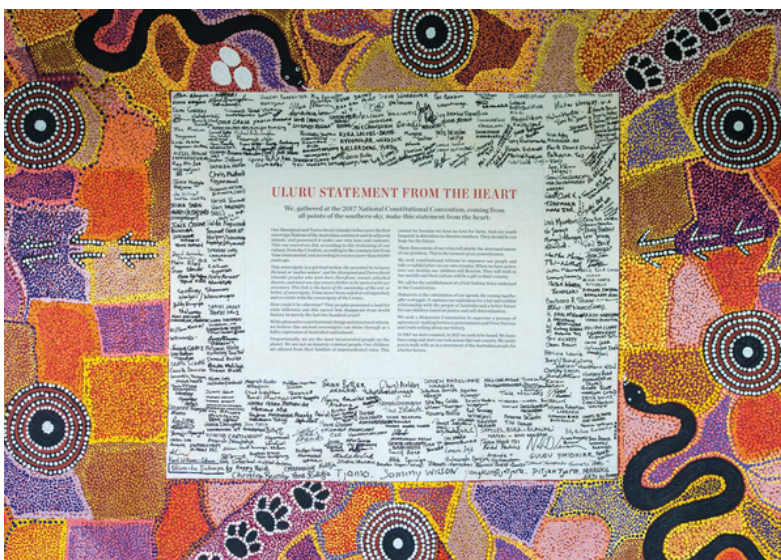
The mandate for a **First Nations Voice to Parliament** to be enshrined in the Constitution comes from the **Uluru Statement from the Heart**. In May 2017, over 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander delegates from all over Australia gathered in the shadow of Uluru and put their signatures on a **historic statement** called the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

This document recalls the ancient and spiritual sovereignty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes as the **first sovereign Nations** of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands, dating back more than 60,000 years. The Statement goes on to recognise the adversity currently faced by **First Nations Australians**, such as their status as "proportionally ... the most incarcerated people on the planet", and the alienation of their children from their communities at unprecedented rates, whilst noting that: "they should be our hope for the future".

To address this adversity, the Uluru Statement from the Heart invites the people of Australia to create a better future by proposing three key reforms, namely:



The first of these reforms called for the establishment of a **First Nations Voice** enshrined in the Constitution. Accordingly, the Uluru Statement concludes:



"In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard."

You can learn more about the Uluru Statement From the Heart and access other useful resources at <https://ulurustatement.org/the-statement/view-the-statement/>.

# THE ULURU STATEMENT FROM THE HEART

Produced by the Referendum Council at the First Nations National Constitutional Convention in May 2017 at Uluru, the Uluru Statement From the Heart reads as follows...

"We, gathered at the 2017 National Constitutional Convention, coming from all points of the southern sky, make this statement from the heart:

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands, and possessed it under our own laws and customs. This our ancestors did, according to the reckoning of our culture, from the Creation, according to the common law from 'time immemorial', and according to science more than 60,000 years ago.

This sovereignty is *a spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land, or 'mother nature', and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born therefrom, remain attached thereto, and must one day return thither to be united with our ancestors. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty.* It has never been ceded or extinguished, and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown.

How could it be otherwise? That peoples possessed a land for sixty millennia and this sacred link disappears from world history in merely the last two hundred years?

With substantive constitutional change and structural reform, we believe this ancient sovereignty can shine through as a fuller expression of Australia's nationhood.

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.

We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution.

Makarrata is the culmination of our agenda: *the coming together after a struggle.* It captures our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination.

We seek a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history.

In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard. We leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country. *We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.*"

# LEARNING TOGETHER



The upcoming Referendum is an opportunity for all of us to recognise and show our support for First Nations Australians. The following resources provide great opportunities to learn more about and advocate for the **First Nations Voice to Parliament**.

Get a comprehensive summary of the Voice to Parliament in **Everything you need to know about the Indigenous Voice Referendum** (7:30 Report) at

<https://youtu.be/RCnv3G0rDLo> 

## TOGETHER, YES – KITCHEN TABLE CONVERSATIONS

Focused on garnering community support for the First Nations Voice to Parliament, **Together, Yes** is bringing people together through **Kitchen Table Conversations** to encourage **listening, learning and community education**. We encourage you to learn more about the **Together, Yes** campaign and consider signing up to become a **Conversation Host**. It's a powerful way you can participate in the upcoming Referendum to enshrine a First Nations Voice in our Constitution.

Find out more about the **Together, Yes** campaign at <https://togetheryes.com.au/>.



## YES 23 – ADVOCATING FOR A FIRST NATIONS VOICE

Australia's Constitution still doesn't recognise our First Australians, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is well and truly time for change. Led by Australians for Indigenous Constitutional Recognition Ltd., **Yes 23** is a primary force in the **YES Campaign**, providing valuable campaign and **educational resources**, as well as **volunteer opportunities**.

Find out more about **Yes 23** at <https://yes23.com.au/>.

# VOICE.GOV.AU – EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

The Australian Government has created a helpful website to increase community awareness of the upcoming Referendum. [Voice.gov.au](https://voice.gov.au/) focuses on **preparing Australians for the national conversation** by providing useful explanations of the Referendum process and the proposed amendment to the Constitution. Offering a **diverse range of educational tools** - including resources designed specifically with and for First Nations communities and translated resources - this site can be used in many ways to **improve community understandings** of the upcoming Referendum.

Check out the website at

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

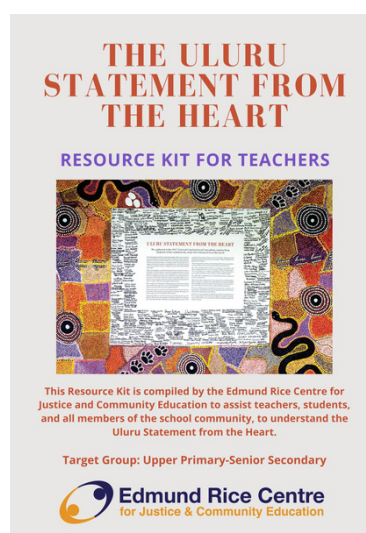
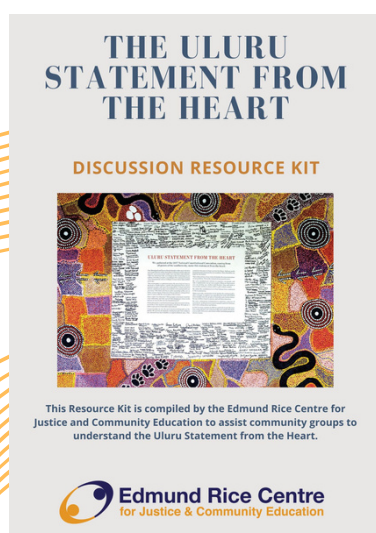


## ERC RESOURCE KITS FOR SCHOOLS

The [Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education](https://www.erc.org.au/) has developed resources to assist in enriching understandings of the **Uluru Statement From the Heart**. These **Resource Kits** serve as useful educational tools to engage students and school communities with First Nations rights advocacy. Offering **background information** and a **diverse range of activities and ideas for engaging students** with the Uluru Statement From the Heart, these resources provide an **accessible introduction** to the context behind the upcoming Referendum. Focused on the importance of **listening to and promoting First Nations voices**, these resources are useful tools that encourage productive discussions and learning about the upcoming Referendum.

Our **Discussion Resource Kit** and **Resource Kit for Teachers** can be found at

[https://www.erc.org.au/constitutional\\_recognition](https://www.erc.org.au/constitutional_recognition).







## Edmund Rice Centre

Awareness. Advocacy. Action.

The **Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education** works to promote **human rights, social justice** and **eco-justice** through research, community education, advocacy and networking.

If you are interested in our work or would like to engage with us further, we invite you to reach out. Our team includes Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff and associates with a background in constitutional law, who can assist with legal questions. If you're interested in connecting, email us at [erc@edmundrice.org](mailto:erc@edmundrice.org).

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### Preparing For the Voice: an introduction to the upcoming Referendum

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