



A MESSAGE FROM MARK YETTICA-PAULSON

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50 years ago my parents were **subject to discrimination unimaginable today** – living under a system of permits and with racism a feature of their daily lives. The 1967 referendum opened a new door for our people.

Last week 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander delegates held an historic meeting at Uluru and adopted a compelling “Statement from the Heart”.

This meeting was convened by the Referendum Council. It was the culmination of the First Nations Dialogues, one of the last stages in their process.

The Uluru Statement called for:

- Constitutional reforms to “empower our people and take a rightful place in our own country”.
- The establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution.
- A Makarrata Commission "to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history".

The Uluru statement has allowed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices to be heard by the nation. It raises issues my people, including my family, have been talking about and progressing for decades – like treaty and agreement-making and truth-telling.

It also calls for a voice in the affairs of the nation – what advocates have called substantive recognition in the Constitution.

The Uluru Statement builds on decades of work including the 1995 Recognition, Rights and Reform report by ATSIC and more recently the 2012 Expert Panel and the 2015 Parliamentary Joint Select Committee reports.

All of this work has canvassed recognition in the Constitution – from symbolic to substantive – and for dealing with racially discriminatory clauses.

The work of Recognise has always been to raise awareness of these principles and prepare the nation for a successful referendum – the only way to change the Australian Constitution. That work will continue.

While we have remained neutral on the model needed to achieve change, we have provided information on all of the options on the table. We will continue to do so, while the nation awaits the final report of the Referendum Council and a response from the Parliament.

Great change requires great patience and tenacity. I look forward to working with you as our nation moves another step closer to this historic change.

ULURU STATEMENT FROM THE HEART

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.