



## AAH Policy

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### INDIGENOUS VOICE CONSULTATION MARCH 2021

The [Australian Academy of the Humanities](#) is the national body for the humanities in Australia. As one of the nation's five Learned Academies, we provide advice to government and policy makers on issues of national and international significance. Our work aims to ensure ethical, historical, and cultural perspectives inform discussions regarding Australia's future challenges and opportunities.

We are grateful for the opportunity to add our voice in support of an Indigenous Voice to Parliament. We acknowledge and respect the work undertaken by the three co-design committees and thank the co-chairs Professor Marcia Langton AM FASSA and Professor Tom Calma AO for their remarkable work in advancing this agenda.

We acknowledge the significant debates occurring within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community – including among academic colleagues and within the Academy's own membership – and the broader community, about sovereignty itself and the best pathways for an Indigenous Voice.

Our own organisational commitment to 'Reconcile & Recognise' is outlined in our [Strategic Plan 2021-25](#):

To meet our objectives to 'Preserve and advance humanities knowledge', 'Inform and influence' and 'Inspire excellence' we will contribute to national efforts to acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledges and practices as foundational to our national story; and recognise the role and contribution of Indigenous researchers and knowledge custodians.

The Academy is committed to diversifying its Fellowship, to electing more Indigenous researchers and practitioners, and to putting in place structures to recognise and respect Indigenous knowledges and expertise across our policy and programs.

Humanities researchers and teachers, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, have been instrumental in promoting knowledge of Australia's distinctive Indigenous cultures to domestic and international audiences. This role is the single most important, distinctive feature of Australian humanities in a global context. More than 65,000 years of Australian Indigenous knowledges continue to offer a transformational perspective on twenty-first century humanities issues from environmental sustainability and restorative justice, to cultural competence and engaged social policy.

The Academy has been deeply informed by the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the democratic collection of voices that it represents and respects its call for a Voice to Parliament.

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#### AUSTRALIAN ACADEMY OF THE HUMANITIES

We are currently working with our counterpart Learned Academies through the [Australian Council of Learned Academies](#) (ACOLA) on ways to support the Uluru Statement. The Learned Academies are institutions steeped in the colonial origins of Western knowledge-gathering. We actively want to contribute towards recognising, engaging with and implementing Indigenous knowledge systems in our work.

At this stage in the consultation process, the Academy of the Humanities is concerned that as currently envisaged by the Government, the Voice co-design process has been separated from constitutional recognition, i.e. enshrining a First Nations Voice in the Constitution, which the Uluru Statement called for. These concerns have been raised by legal experts, humanities researchers, and those involved in the co-design process.<sup>1</sup>

We, therefore, urge the Government to listen to the From the Heart submission on the Interim Report from the Uluru Statement which calls for:

1. the Government to honour its election commitment to a referendum once a model for the Voice has been settled
2. enabling legislation for the Voice to be passed after a referendum has been held in the next term of Parliament
3. a membership model for the National Voice that ensures previously unheard Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the same chance of being selected as established leadership figures.<sup>2</sup>

If we are truly committed to reconciliation with our First Nations People, we must embrace and action the instruments that they unequivocally tell us will help catalyse this – constitutional enshrinement, treaties, and truth-telling.

For non-Indigenous Australians, this process offers an opportunity to acknowledge the nature of Australia's past, and its privilege and pride in sharing the continent with the oldest continuing culture on earth.

If you would like to discuss our submission, or any details of our work, please contact the Academy's Executive Director, Dr Christina Parolin on (02) 6125 9860 or [christina.parolin@humanities.org.au](mailto:christina.parolin@humanities.org.au)

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<sup>1</sup> Appleby, Gabrielle (22 January 2021), 'An Indigenous 'Voice' must be enshrined in our Constitution. Here's why', *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/an-indigenous-voice-must-be-enshrined-in-our-constitution-heres-why-153635>; Gooley, Cameron (18 March 2021), 'Indigenous leader Noel Pearson continues push for constitutional recognition and Voice to Parliament,' ABC News <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-03-17/noel-pearson-speech-indigenous-constitutional-recognition/13256956>; Rowse, Tim (1 February 2021) 'Is the Voice already being muted?' *Inside Story*, <https://insidestory.org.au/is-the-voice-already-being-muted/>  
<sup>2</sup> See <https://fromtheheart.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Interim-Voice-Co-Design-report-From-the-Heart-submission.pdf>