



Relentlessly Pursuing Reconciliation

Catholic Social Services Victoria supports a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament as articulated by the [Uluru Statement from the Heart](#).

The Council and Members of Catholic Social Services Victoria (CSSV) celebrate that our engagement throughout Victoria takes place on the sacred land and waterways of the many cultural groups of the Aboriginal Peoples of Victoria. CSSV is committed to listening and walking with the First Peoples of Australia in the true spirit of makarrata: coming together after this long painful struggle for recognition, true justice and full flourishing for all Australians.

CSSV is the peak body for 42 social and community service member organisations that work throughout Victoria. The work of our members, as they support over 200,000 Victorians each year, means that we hold deep concern for issues of Justice in our state and country. The experiences of our members and those our members work to serve, as well as the principles of Catholic Social Teachings, lead us to a firm commitment to being an active part of a country and society that seeks Reconciliation.

Within the Catholic social services network, CSSV wish to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients, staff, volunteers, friends, families, colleagues and community members have resourced opportunity to participate meaningfully in bettering Federal Government-made laws and policies that impact on them — which we are convinced will contribute to the betterment of our society and community as a whole.

There are a number practical and systemic changes that need to be taken to embrace the aspirations of our First Nations Peoples to take their rightful place in Australian society and gain true equality. One core mechanism to enact the work of reconciliation and common good is through the addition of a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament. The urgency of this referendum to make this possible is palpable — in 1986 Pope John Paul II addressed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples pronouncing “Certainly, what has been done cannot be undone. But what can now be done to remedy the deeds of yesterday must not be put off till tomorrow.” We must not wait another moment!

Justice

CSSV sees the deep pain that has been inflicted over many generations, including racist government policies and public attitudes, and corresponding loss and disruption of culture and connection with land, stolen generations and genocidal acts. We recognise our own place within this horrific past — the 5th Plenary Council of Australia's statement Reconciliation: Healing Wounds, Receiving Gifts accepts that "The Catholic Church in Australia has been caught up in this history of dispossession, Stolen Generations, racism, and the undermining of language and culture".

The strength of conviction for a just future and the good will of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in spite of this history inspires us. We take seriously the words of Pat Dodson "[this is a matter of justice, not special benefit.](#)" There is a necessity of justice being central tenet going forward if we are to write a new chapter and move on positively together as a country — listening to the urging for a Voice to parliament is part of this, and truth telling and treaty will provide other parts.

CSSV, in fidelity to Gospel values, dedicate our prayers and actions at this time — as a part of a hope-filled community — to the complex work of reconciliation, and to bring about tangible change and healing in our country.

Enrichment and Healing

Recognition of the past, coupled with ongoing listening to, and input from, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on matters that uniquely concern them, among others, are essential elements in taking meaningful steps towards justice and real reconciliation. In turn this can lead to healing, shared learning and a renewed way of relating to each other and the country we all now share.

We are invited by the Uluru Statement and the upcoming constitutional referendum, in the words of Br Damien Price CFC, "[not to see this as a grudging capitulation...but rather a sacred opportunity for the entire Australian community to grow into a fullness of expression of our nationhood and thus shine for the whole world.](#)"

Alongside [Catholic Religious Australia](#), the recent [5th Plenary Council of the Catholic Church in Australia](#) and the [Australian Catholic Bishops Conference](#), we believe that a Voice to Parliament, in whatever form is legislated once constitutionally enshrined, will provide a platform for deeper listening and allow for the appreciation of different perspectives and ways of doing, being and living by those making legislation and policy.

The Voice will also allow community listening and discussion on different ways of being and doing life together in Australia. This will be of great value to us all.

The Archbishop of Melbourne, Peter A Comensoli, has described the Uluru Statement of the Heart as offering a "gift of grace to our nation". He urges "A gift, however, only has value if there is a receiver who welcomes it openly and humbly. The exchange then can truly become an act of love. How we now receive this invitation, therefore, is important – not just to those who have given it to us as a nation, but to each of us individually as brothers and sisters."

It is now up to us, as Australian organisations and citizens, to take up the generous invitation of the Uluru Statement. In 2023, key to this invitation is together bringing about a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament.


Equity

While we appreciate there are differing views on how meaningful steps should or could be taken in relation to the work of reconciliation by many across communities, The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (NATSICC) have said that recommendations of the Uluru Statement from the Heart must be implemented if Closing the Gap targets are to be met. Bishop Columba Macbeth-Green OSPPE, chair of the Australian Bishops Commission for Relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, affirmed recently in relation to the Uluru Statement that “...Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples shaping their own future is one the Catholic Church has learned is easily the best way forward”.

Beginning with a Voice to Parliament, and by working in good faith with that Voice as a part of the broader work of reconciliation, truth telling and treaty will make Australia a better nation, and life fuller for every Australian. A constitutionally enshrined Voice, as a marriage of listening, action, influence and symbolism, is key to changing our nation for the better.

We have reached a time of great possibility in making meaningful reparation for the past and building a better future – in this moment it is the offer of a constitutional referendum to decide upon a Voice to the Australian Parliament. We know that the success of any referendum relies on a ‘double majority’ vote in the affirmative. We implore each member of the Victorian and Australian community to make every effort to ensure this valuable opportunity is not missed. By finding common ground, setting aside political differences and seizing this as an opportunity to listen and learn we can positively bring into being a time where all in Australia “may have life and have it abundantly”.

Learn more and take action here:

 <https://css.org.au/advocacy-policy/reconciliation-in-australia>

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