



ABC
Radio National

SA joins NSW in campaign for Indigenous constitutional recognition

Reporter: Felicity James
ABC Radio – *The World Today*
23 May 2016

ELEANOR HALL: Well today, South Australia became the second state to sign up to the campaign to recognise Indigenous Australians in the constitution, joining New South Wales.

But the campaign is facing opposition from those who argue that Indigenous Australians should be negotiating a treaty, rather than fighting for constitutional recognition.

Two Indigenous leaders in the Northern Territory say the government-funded Recognise campaign is a waste of money, as Felicity James reports.

FELICITY JAMES: The South Australian Premier Jay Weatherill is hoping his Government's support will boost the Recognise campaign and its push to remove racist provisions from the Constitution.

JAY WEATHERILL: A quarter of a million Australians have signed up to the Recognise campaign, declaring their support to recognise the first Australians in the Australian Constitution, and I encourage all South Australians to do the same.

Former AFL star Adam Goodes is an ambassador for Recognise.

ADAM GOODES: It's a great opportunity to bring everyone together. Yeah a lot of people, a majority of people that are part of society today, they weren't there when the founding document was written about our constitution.

But we've got an opportunity to re-write that document.

FELICITY JAMES: But some Indigenous people want more.

Nineteen-year-old Will Austin is a Gunditjmara man from south west Victoria and moved to Darwin about six months ago.

While he supports recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Constitution, he says a treaty is long-overdue.

WILL AUSTIN: I think there's a lot of kind of grass roots issues that are much more important than kind of that at the moment. I think that our mob's, you know, we're such a proud, resilient mob, because of the history that this country has.

And I think that a treaty is what we all want and I think that if that's what we all want as one mob then we can go for that.

FELICITY JAMES: Jade Jones-Cubillo is a 20-year-old Larrakia woman from Darwin.

Ms Jones-Cubillo and Mr Austin work with the Northern Territory Indigenous Leadership program IMPACT, training up school students to be leaders in their communities and reconnect with culture.

JADE JONES-CUBILLO: No-one really kind of asked us what we want they kind of make decisions for us and that's really hard you know when we've got all these people that are really high up that don't really want to get down on the ground and say 'hey, like what do you want as a young Aboriginal person? What do you want and how do you want to be recognised?'

And I think that gets missed quite a lot.

FELICITY JAMES: The federal budget earlier this month allocated \$5 million to the Recognise campaign.

Ms Jones-Cubillo and Mr Austin think the money would've been better spent elsewhere.

JADE JONES-CUBILLO: A discussion's been had and things have been had and we're at that point so why's there's money still going towards this thing? And I just - Recognise gives me the shits. That's all I can say, I don't know what else to say.

You probably will say it in a nicer way cause I'm just... (makes sound of frustration)

WILL AUSTIN: Yeah no, I think I'm with Jade. I think Recognise themselves probably don't even know what they're trying to do at the moment. I think it's not a true representation of our mob and the voice and what we want to have heard.

FELICITY JAMES: Shannan Dodson is the digital campaign manager for Recognise.

SHANNAN DODSON: As an Aboriginal woman myself, I'm a Yawuru woman from Broome, and you know the state of affairs with funding for Indigenous Affairs has been really disheartening over the past few years and so I can see why it could be really difficult to hear about funding for the Recognise campaign.

FELICITY JAMES: Ms Dodson says the issue of treaty has been raised during Recognise campaign consultations, but her organisation's role is focused on changes to the Constitution.

SHANNAN DODSON: That's been our job all along, is to education Australians on constitutional change; something that's been called for, for decades, you know, by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, it was called by ATSIC, by Indigenous leaders and activists.

FELICITY JAMES: Ms Jones-Cubillo says there's no question about the support for a treaty.

JADE JONES-CUBILLO: How are we still fighting for this to be something already?

Like you know, I kind of think whether Australia's ready or not we're ready. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, we're ready, we want it.

ELEANOR HALL: That's Jade Jones-Cubillo ending that report from Felicity James.