

Land council CEO Sean Gordon quits Libs over recognition refusal



Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council chief executive Sean Gordon. Picture: Sue Graham.

- *The Australian*
- 15 November 2017
- Stephen Fitzpatrick

Malcolm Turnbull's rejection of indigenous constitutional recognition proposals contained in the Uluru Statement has prompted the furious resignation from the Liberal Party by an indigenous leader and businessman central to the process.

Sean Gordon, chief executive of the wealthy Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council on the NSW central coast, a signatory to the Uluru Statement and a leader in the Empowered Communities program that the Prime Minister this week suggested was an alternative to a proposed indigenous parliamentary advisory body, said in his resignation letter he was "disillusioned and disappointed in the lack of leadership evident in the party".

In the letter, addressed to NSW party director Chris Stone, Mr Gordon said the spurning of the proposed advisory body contradicted both Liberal Party principles and "Turnbull's own philosophy, and his promise 'to do things with, rather than do things to' indigenous people'. "This was Turnbull's opportunity to constitutionalise his promise (but) instead he has betrayed indigenous Australians and underestimated the Australian people," he said.

The Referendum Council, established by Mr Turnbull and Bill Shorten to advise on ways forward for constitutional recognition, endorsed the Uluru Statement's recommendation of a constitutionally enshrined advisory body to the parliament, as

well as a Makarrata commission to oversee treaties and a truth-telling process, and a declaration of recognition established outside the Constitution.

Mr Gordon said the summary dismissal of its sole constitutional recommendation — the advisory body — through a newspaper leak, without reference to the council or any other indigenous leaders, had left him “heartbroken”. He told *The Australian* a follow-up press release from Mr Turnbull was a “cruel and deliberately ferocious attack on the entirely sensible reform”. “I was disgusted at the methodical slander of the Referendum Council, let alone the hundreds of delegates at Uluru and the preceding regional dialogues attended by hundreds of people,” he said.

Mr Gordon, who this year announced he was considering running for the state seat of Gosford, said he had come to regard the Liberal Party as his “political home” and one from which he could “argue and agitate for my people — for our rights and for our right to take responsibility”.

He said his resignation was “not some knee-jerk reaction born just of outrage” or an “impromptu dummy spit”, but that he was “deeply and fundamentally disillusioned and disappointed at the abject lack of leadership in the party and Turnbull’s inability to lead for all Australians and to uphold his own party values”.

“I am proudly Aboriginal and a strong believer in the principles of empowerment and self-determination,” Mr Gordon said.

“I practise these values in every aspect of my life and I thought my values aligned with those of the Liberal Party. I have come to see this is not the case.”

Mr Turnbull’s characterisation of the reform as one that would not win wide support was incorrect, Mr Gordon said, and this was demonstrated by a growing chorus of voices backing it: “People like Alan Jones, Chris Kenny, Jeff Kennett, Julian Leeser MP and Major General Michael Jeffrey.”