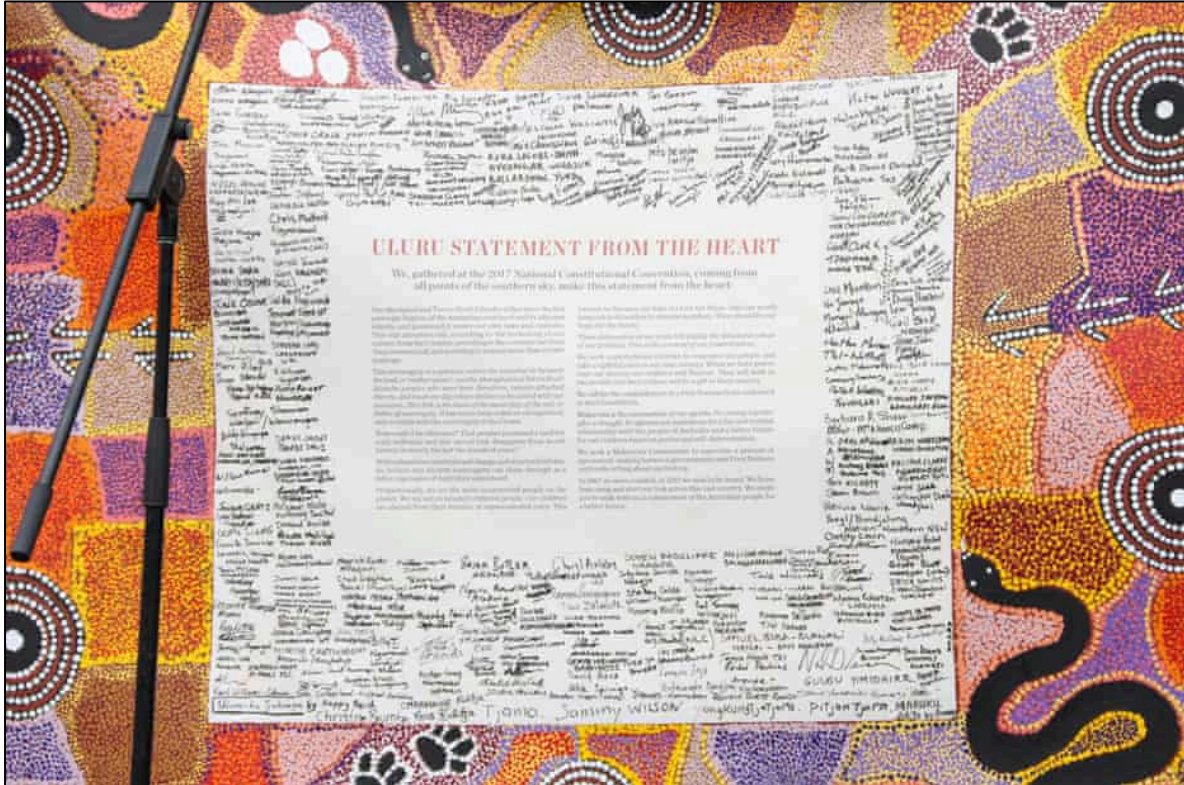


Australians urged to back Indigenous voice to parliament in History is Calling campaign

First Nations leaders call for referendum to 'do what 1967 didn't do, which is empower our people'



The Uluru Statement from the Heart. A new education campaign urges a referendum to enshrine First Nations people in the constitution.

Caitlin Cassidy
Mon 9 May 2022

A new education campaign pushing for a First Nations voice to parliament is being unrolled by the creators of the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

The History is Calling campaign will urge Australians to answer the Uluru Dialogue's 2017 invitation to legally enshrine First Nations people in the constitution via a referendum as an urgent election issue.

Uluru Statement leader Roy Ah-See said First Nations people had been “at the whim” of consecutive governments that had failed to protect their rights and it was “long overdue” for their voice to be constitutionally enshrined.

“The data's there, in terms of overrepresentation in the criminal justice system, health statistics, infant mortality rates; it's appalling, we've gone backward,” he said.

“In 1967, I was six months old when ... non-Aboriginal citizens of this country gave my mother citizenship. Now it’s time to give my kids a voice in this country and future generations and we can do that through a referendum.

“We don’t want a green voice, we don’t want a red voice, we don’t want a blue voice: we want a black voice.”

Ah-See said the Uluru Statement was “never for the politicians”, but was a gift to the Australian people, who were best placed to vote on constitutional recognition.

“Consecutive governments haven’t had our best interests at heart and legislation isn’t going to cut it,” he said. “The momentum’s there, the mood has shifted. We’ve lost a lot of First Nations people that haven’t seen a voice realised. It’s time.”

The Uluru Dialogue co-chair Prof Megan Davis was the first person to read the statement to the nation. Five years on, she said it represented a powerful moment of “all Australians walking together in a movement for a better future”.

“Silence never made history and on the occasion of the fifth anniversary ... the empowerment of our people is in the hands of the Australian public,” she said.

“The referendum mechanism empowers all Australians to work together to change the nation, as they did in 1967.”

The Uluru statement was delivered on 27 May 2017 following a lengthy consultation process and three days of talks between First Nations delegates from across the nation. It has not been enacted, nor have the Coalition’s plans to legislate for a non-constitutional voice to parliament been tabled.

Last month, the Uluru statement leadership put forward two dates Australians could be called to decide by referendum whether to enshrine a voice to parliament in the constitution: 27 May 2023 or 27 January 2024.

Labor said it would hold a referendum in its first term if it wins the federal election, indicating to Guardian Australia its preference was for a 2024 date. It has also committed to enacting the Uluru statement in its entirety.

The Coalition wouldn’t be drawn on setting a date but the minister for Indigenous Australians, Ken Wyatt, said the government remained “committed to getting it right” and it would go to a referendum “once a consensus is reached”.

The co-chair of the Uluru Dialogue, Pat Anderson, said Australians were being provided with a “once in a generation” chance to “do what 1967 didn’t do, which is empower our people”.

“First Nations peoples have been fighting for a space in democratic life for generations, and to this day, we still have no say in the laws and policies which affect us,” he said.

“Now, we have the opportunity to change the course of history ... this is nation-building.”

The national education campaign will run throughout May and June.