



Voice to Parliament

Conversation Guide

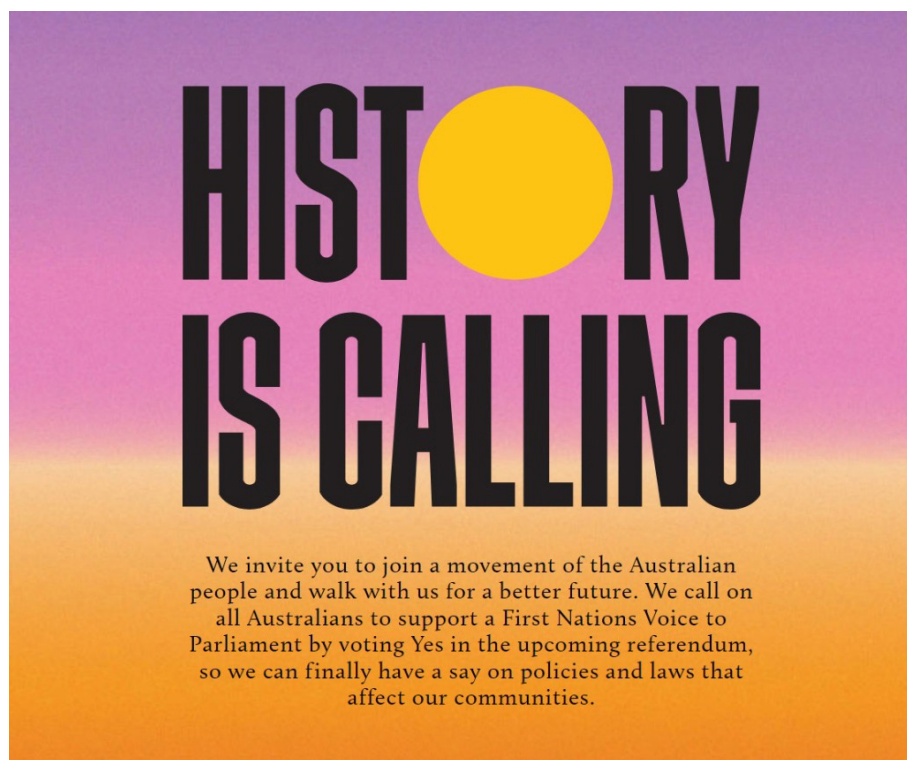


Jesuit
Social Services
Building a Just Society

Overview

This document is designed to guide a conversation about the Indigenous Voice to Parliament and the referendum taking place in the second half of 2023, which will ask the Australian people if they agree there should be a Voice enshrined in the constitution.

The referendum is the culmination of a decade-long process that gained momentum with the release of the Uluru Statement from the Heart in 2017, when over 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander delegates offered an invitation to non-indigenous Australians to walk with them to create a better future. Specifically, these delegates called for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution and a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making and truth-telling about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history. The Voice to Parliament is an opportunity for the Australian public to facilitate a process of inclusion — an opportunity that may not present itself again.



You can learn more about the process, the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the referendum here: <https://ulurustatement.org>

Acknowledgement: The cover artwork was created by children participating in Jesuit Social Services' school holiday program in the New South Wales community of Willmot under the guidance of Jason from Dalmarri. Learn more about Jason's work here: dalmarri.com.au

Sequence

Item	Time Guide	Script
Setting the scene	5 minutes	<p>Thank you for coming and for being part of just one of hundreds of conversations about what it means to have a voice and be heard in the context of the Indigenous Voice to Parliament. We're here to better understand the issues and talk about the pathway forward.</p> <p>The first thing I want to do is acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land we are currently on — (you can find tips to identify the name of the Traditional Custodians here). I want to pay respect to their Elders past and present.</p> <p>Before we go any further, there are some basic guidelines to help us have a positive and productive conversation, based on a foundation of mutual respect.</p> <p>ACTION: Host passes around the printed page of house guidelines.</p>

House rules

No one has all the answers

The best conversations give everyone a chance to speak and be heard. Respect other people and their views, and make sure to leave enough time for your fellow guests to share their ideas.

Share as much or as little as you want

Think about what you want to share with the group, and don't feel pressure to talk about anything you don't want to.

Sometimes we just won't agree

We want people to exchange their views and respond to each other, but that doesn't mean everyone will agree. However, everyone's ideas have a place in the conversation.

Remember why we're doing this

This discussion will inform our votes at the referendum and help us make an informed decision about the Voice to Parliament.

Follow the host

Your host is facilitating the discussion and keeping an eye on time, so help them out by following their lead and keeping the conversation on track. The best conversations give everyone a chance to speak and be heard. Respect other people and their views, and make sure to leave enough time for your fellow guests to share their ideas.

Personal reflection**20 minutes**

OK — we're here today to talk about what it means to have a seat at the table. For a start, I want you to reflect on the simple fact that we are all here to have a discussion.

We all have a voice and will have a chance to put forward our ideas, beliefs and feelings. We are already starting with respect for each other and the ability to take part — even if we leave in disagreement, we will have had a chance to represent ourselves and have our voices heard.

A time when you didn't have agency

To start the conversation, I want everyone to think about a time when you weren't in charge of the things that were happening to you. Have you become redundant or lost a job due to circumstances out of your control? Has your rent or mortgage repayments been increased with little warning? How about during the COVID-19 pandemic? Or perhaps you disagreed with a planning decision in your local area.

How did being in that position make you feel in the moment? Were you able to express anything about the impact the situation had on you? Were you heard? Did anything change?

I'll go first...

ACTION: Host shares a specific example from their own life, then goes around the table. The host's example should be something that impacted them quite heavily but they had no say over.

As the host goes around the room, people can be skipped if they need more time but they should be returned to as this works best when everyone shares.

ACTION: Host notes down the emotions people experienced and reads out the list after the last person finishes speaking.

Thank you for sharing. I want to think about how things could have been better. In your mind, return to that moment, and think about something that could have helped you have more agency. The overarching decisions may still have been made, but perhaps adjustments and alterations might have been considered and your voice and situation was taken into consideration.

ACTION: Host goes first again and then each person speaks in turn around the table.

Item	Time Guide	Script
Introducing the issues	5 minutes	<p>As we've spoken about, it's important to have opportunities to have your voice heard and raised. But not everyone has these opportunities. The story has been, and still is, different for First Nations Peoples.</p> <p>In the past, First Nations Peoples haven't had opportunities to have input into policies and decisions that affect their lives. There has been a pattern of exclusion and sidelining of concerns of Indigenous peoples in Australian politics. Non-Indigenous politicians have made decisions on behalf of First Nations peoples and imposed policies which have actively taken away autonomy.</p> <p>We have seen things like the classification of Aboriginal Australians as animals on the arrival of European ships, the Stolen Generations where children were forcibly removed from caring families and, more recently, the Intervention Act.</p> <p>First Nations Peoples are strong and resilient and have made incredible efforts to work for a more just Australia. For instance, the Tent Embassy on the lawns of Old Parliament House has been ongoing for 50 years. Nowhere else in the world have we seen such longevity around a site of protest.</p> <p>Despite the National Apology to the Stolen Generations and other changes and intentions, governments have not, and cannot, by themselves provide sustainable solutions. A Voice to Parliament would ensure that First Nations Peoples are able to advise politicians about what really works in their communities. It's about recognition and participation.</p>

Understanding the issues **5 minutes**

ACTION: Host should choose one of the following three suggested videos to play to the group. Options include:

- [History is calling](#)
- [What is a voice to Parliament](#)
- [Voice to Parliament – what does it mean?](#)

ACTION: Hand around printouts of the Uluru Statement from the Heart (download the statement [here](#))

What exactly is being proposed?

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have asked for this recognition to be in the form of a Voice to Parliament.

Item	Time Guide	Script
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Understanding the issues (cont'd)

A referendum is needed to change Australia’s Constitution. The proposed addition to the Constitution reads as follows:
In recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as the First Peoples of Australia:

1. There shall be a Body, to be called the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice.
2. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice may make representations to Parliament and the Executive Government on matters relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.
3. The Parliament shall, subject to the Constitution, have power to make laws with respect to the composition, functions, powers and procedures of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice.

The referendum will be put to the Australian people in the form of the following question:

Do you support an alteration to the Constitution that establishes an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice?

To approve this change, Australian voters write the answer ‘Yes’ to the question when voting in the referendum.

What needs to change?

30 minutes

ACTION: Group discussion facilitated by host. Get through as many questions as possible in 30 mins.

[If people raise concerns or questions follow guidance in Yes campaign [conversation guide booklet](#)]

Reflecting on what we just shared about a time when we had no agency over a decision that had an impact on us, and hearing what is being proposed in terms of the change to the Constitution, do you think it is important to give Indigenous Australians a voice in the decisions that are made about their communities?

Being sidelined and excluded from decision-making about issues that affect you doesn’t feel respectful. Do you think the Voice is a useful change which will provide useful input into decision-making and promote tangible difference?

What else, as a community, could we do to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to have a say and be part of decision-making?

What is one concern, if any, that you have about the Voice process, and what might address those concerns?

ACTION: Host to take notes on main ideas and thoughts expressed around the table.

Item	Time Guide	Script
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Final thoughts and actions

10 minutes

That discussion was really interesting, and thanks everyone for sharing your thoughts and ideas.

There are also some simple actions we can take tonight to show support for the Yes campaign and let the community know that we want a fair go for First Nations People.

ACTION: Host provides guests with resources ([Yes campaign resources](#))

ACTION: Split group into pairs to discuss what actions they are going to take, and write down each guest's proposed action.

Did anyone have any final thoughts or feedback that you want us to share? Thanks for coming, it's been a really great conversation. Let me know if you want to host one of these or have any other thoughts about these issues.



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