

17 September 2024

Joint Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

Via email: JSCATSIA@aph.gov.au

Dear Joint Standing Committee,

Re: Submission to the Inquiry into the Truth and Justice Commission Bill 2024

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Truth and Justice Commission Bill 2024 (the Bill).

Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation. We have been working for 47 years delivering support services and advocating for improved policies, legislation and resources to achieve a just society where all people can thrive. We work with young people and adults who have contact with the justice system and offer diversion, restorative group conferencing, transitional support and intensive support for community orders. We also deliver programs in other areas such as men's violence, housing, mental health, employment and training.

We work with some of the most disadvantaged and marginalised members of our communities, who often experience multiple and complex challenges. We work where the need is greatest and where we have the capacity, experience and skills to make the most difference. We work with individuals and communities across Victoria, New South Wales and the Northern Territory.

Across our programs approximately 18 per cent of participants identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. In Western Sydney this figure is higher, at 67 per cent, and in the Northern Territory – where our work is delivered in partnership with local Aboriginal communities and organisations – 88 per cent of participants in our programs identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

Jesuit Social Services supports the introduction of the Bill, and recommends that the Federal Government pass it. We strongly affirm the Government's commitments to implement the Uluru Statement from the Heart (the Uluru Statement) in full and to establish a Makarrata Commission as a priority.¹ The Uluru Statement included three components of Truth, Treaty and Voice. While the No result of last year's Voice to Parliament referendum was a heartbreaking outcome which hindered progress towards self-determination and reconciliation, the establishment of a truth-telling process led by First Nations people and communities must remain a priority.²

¹ Allam, Lorena (2022). Explainer: Voice, treaty, truth: what does Labor's commitment to Uluru Statement from the Heart mean? *The Guardian*. [Weblink](#); Anthony Albanese PM (2021). Makarrata Commission. [Weblink](#).

² Allam, Lorena (2022). Explainer: Voice, treaty, truth: what does Labor's commitment to Uluru Statement from the Heart mean? *The Guardian*. [Weblink](#); Jesuit Social Services (2023). No referendum result a sombre outcome for all. [Weblink](#).

Jesuit Social Services has endorsed and supported the Uluru Statement since it was first presented to the Australian people in 2017.³ The proposed Truth and Justice Commission offers a valuable opportunity to implement the Uluru Statement and enable proper truth-telling about our history. This process is a necessary step towards reconciliation and a society in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians can acknowledge the past together before moving towards future agreement-making such as Treaty.

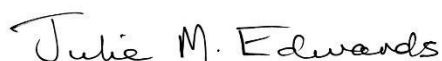
Several local truth-telling processes are underway in Australian states and territories. In some cases, this has resulted in recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sovereignty and active steps towards redress and healing. In Victoria, the Yoorrook Justice Commission is the most comprehensive and progressed example of state-level truth telling. Yoorrook hearings have gathered evidence from Traditional Owners, government, churches and academics on injustices against First Peoples since colonisation across areas including child protection, justice, housing and health. Any Aboriginal person has been able to submit to the Commission, in particular those who have experiences of out of home care, prisons and justice systems such as engagement with police.

The Federal Government has a responsibility to listen to and support such history making work. Ultimately, however, truth about the violence and dispossession that has occurred and continues to occur in this country must be told and heard at the national level if Australia is to avoid repetition of past wrongs and move towards justice, reconciliation and healing. The proposed Truth and Justice Commission would be a powerful way to begin this process formally, and such an important process should not be delayed.

In summary, we strongly support the Bill. We believe the establishment of a Truth and Justice Commission would be a welcome and necessary step towards justice and reconciliation.

We welcome further discussion with the Joint Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs regarding the feedback detailed in this letter.

Yours sincerely,



Julie Edwards
Chief Executive Officer

³ Jesuit Social Services (2023). Voice to Parliament – Jesuit Social Services’ Position Statement. [Weblink](#).