

YOUR GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING THE VOICE

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW
ABOUT THE 2023 REFERENDUM

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AUSTRALIA

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DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS



THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER VOICE TO PARLIAMENT.

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of this land and pay our respects to Elders, past and present. This land always was and always will be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land. We acknowledge the resilience and strength of First Nations People and communities who have led and continue to lead the fight for human rights in Australia.

Amnesty International Australia is a community of passionate people from all walks of life - defending human rights is what brings us together. We are powerful when we act in solidarity.

As a human rights organisation, we recognise that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to progress First Nations rights in Australia.

We are committed to campaigning to ensure all human rights are recognised and realised for all First Nations Peoples, and as such support voting in favour of the Voice to Parliament.

People like you play a vital role in challenging injustice, and we thank you for the work you are already doing to advocate for justice, freedom and equality.

Thank you for creating a kinder world.

Follow Lucas on Instagram!
[@musu_arts](#)

Cover and guide artwork by Lucas Schober, a Pablo Clan, Wuthathi, Yadheigana, Kaurareg and Yindjibarndi First Nations man. ←

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WARNING: This guide may contain images or names of people who have passed away.

Amnesty International Australia — defending human rights

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**I WANT TO SEE OUR
YOUNG ONES LIVING
IN HAPPY, HEALTHY
COMMUNITIES, COMING
OUT OF SCHOOL
EDUCATED AND GETTING
GOOD JOBS.**



Rodney Dillon. © Amnesty International

Rodney Dillon here. I'm a proud Palawa man from Lutruwita, Tasmania. I have worked at Amnesty for the past sixteen years.

My great-great Grandmother Smith was the daughter of Tanganooturra, from Cape Portland in Lutruwita. Tanganooturra was forcibly removed to Wybalenna on Flinders Island. She survived the invasion, but like the other Aboriginal children at Wybalenna, she was taken from her mother.

Grandmother Smith was a powerful woman who has always inspired me. She eventually managed to move to the southeast of Lutruwita. My family has lived down this way now for generations. This is where we belong now.

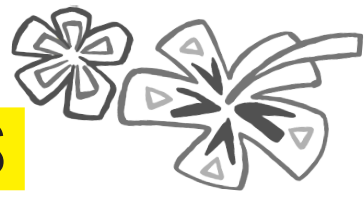
Fighting for justice for my people is something I just have to do until things change for the better.

In my lifetime I want to see our young ones living in happy, healthy communities, coming out of school educated and getting good jobs. I want to play a part in putting them on the road to becoming community leaders.

Non-Indigenous people's support and influence can be really, really important to make positive change. We need people who are willing to understand the past so these families have got a safer future. The people who put the wall up, I can understand why it's there, but the people who pull it down - they're the ones we need.

RODNEY DILLON

Proud Palawa Elder and Amnesty International Indigenous Rights Advisor



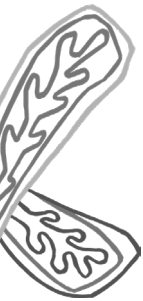
ALL ABOUT REFERENDUMS

The last referendum was in 1999 - nearly 25 years ago!
Whether it's your first time voting in a referendum, or it's just been a while, it's okay to have questions.

Like you, we care about the future of Australia. The right to vote is powerful and it's one of the most important ways we stand up for justice and equality, together. We understand and appreciate that it's a responsibility you take seriously.

Thank you for picking up this guide and for seeking more information to help you make an educated and informed decision on polling day.

FIRST OFF, WHAT IS A REFERENDUM?



A VOTE TO CHANGE THE CONSTITUTION
A referendum is when voters are asked to write YES or NO in answer to a question or questions. The only way to change Australia's Constitution is via a referendum.

VOTING IS COMPULSORY
It is compulsory by law for all eligible Australian citizens aged 18 and older to enrol and vote in referendums.

THE RESULT IS LEGALLY BINDING
The results of the referendum must be carried out by Parliament and are legally binding.

DOUBLE MAJORITY WINS
A successful referendum needs a **double majority**. This means a majority of votes in at least four states as well as a majority across the whole of Australia.

DID YOU KNOW?



The 1967 Referendum was the most successful ever with 90.77% of Australians voting YES to remove two references in the Constitution which discriminated against Aboriginal People! **Nearly 60 years later, with the help of supporters like you, we can make history again.**



Child's hand holding an older person's hand.

Since 1901, there have been 44 referendums to change the Constitution.

An issue put to the vote which does not affect the Constitution is called a plebiscite - the 2017 Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey is the most recent example.

THREE EASY STEPS TO PREPARE FOR THE REFERENDUM

1

Are you over 18? Have you recently moved to a new address? Go to check.aec.gov.au and check that you're enrolled to vote.

2

On October 14th, you can vote at polling places at schools and other public buildings around the country. Find your local polling place: aec.gov.au/referendums/vote/find-my-polling-place.html

3

At the polling place, you will receive a ballot paper with ONE question:

"A Proposed Law: to alter the Constitution to recognise the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice. Do you approve this proposed alteration?"

On the ballot paper, you need to indicate your vote by clearly writing YES or NO. Practice filling out a ballot here: aec.gov.au/referendums/vote/completing-the-ballot-paper.html

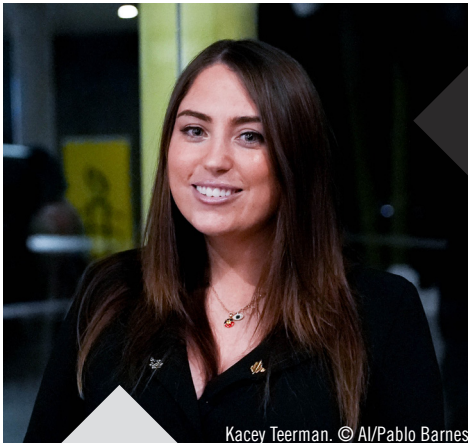
Learn about early & postal voting options here too!

THE ULURU STATEMENT

For generations, First Nations People have fought for the right to inform the decisions made for their families, their communities and their lands.

The proposal for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament came from the Uluru Statement from the Heart which was adopted in 2017.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart was the result of decades of extensive First Nations advocacy and consultation on what constitutional recognition should look like.



Kacey Teerman. © AI/Pablo Barnes



**THIS IS THE MOST
EXTENSIVE FIRST
NATIONS CONSULTATION
PROCESS IN
AUSTRALIAN HISTORY.**

This work has spanned over 13 years, 8 processes and 11 reports. Regional dialogues held all across the country were comprised of First Nation Traditional Owners, community leaders, members of Land Councils and representative bodies.

Over 1,200 delegates selected their own representatives to attend the First Nations Constitutional Convention at Uluru. At the Convention, and by an overwhelming consensus, more than 250 delegates adopted the Uluru Statement.

KACEY TEERMAN

Proud Gomerai woman and Amnesty International Indigenous Rights Campaigner

“

BEING PART OF THE ULURU STATEMENT WORKING GROUP HAS BEEN A REALLY GREAT JOURNEY FOR ME. I'M EXCITED ABOUT HOW MUCH CHANGE THIS CAN MAKE. I AM PROUD TO WORK ALONGSIDE YOU ALL AS WE CREATE HISTORY TOGETHER.

Rodney Dillon, proud Palawa Elder and Amnesty International Indigenous Rights Advisor

WHAT DOES THE ULURU STATEMENT CALL FOR?

1

**VOICE TO
PARLIAMENT**

2

TREATY

3

TRUTH-TELLING



WHY NOT TREATY FIRST?

The Uluru Statement from the Heart calls for Voice, Treaty and Truth, in that order, as decided on by the First Nations delegates at the 2017 Constitutional Convention. This order was based on the priorities of the respective representatives from across the country.

Starting with the Voice is starting with the Constitution - it's the highest law in the land and starting there is the best way to achieve tangible change.

Aboriginal flag flying next to an Australian flag.



THE VOICE TO PARLIAMENT



The Voice to Parliament will be an advisory body of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives. Their job will be to give independent advice to the Parliament and the Executive on matters relating to First Nations People.

Put simply, a Voice to Parliament gives Indigenous Peoples a seat at the table when decisions are being made that specifically affect them.

In addition, putting the Voice in the Constitution will give it independence and stability, ensuring that First Nations voices are heard now and into the future.

The exact design of the Voice will be determined following a successful referendum, in a process with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, Parliament, and the broader public.

Legislation to establish the Voice will then go through standard parliamentary processes.

The idea for the Voice is the direct result of decades of advocacy and consultation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.

More than 80% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People support the Voice to Parliament.

Throughout history, First Nations People have campaigned, rallied and achieved incredible wins in the face of systemic injustice and denial of their human rights.

The good news is that the 2023 Referendum represents another step forward to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People across Australia. **This is our opportunity to come together and make Australia a country that truly reflects our shared values.**

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I've seen really poor housing, I've seen inside of prisons where we've got 10-year-old kids. I see the empty classrooms and kids not going to school.

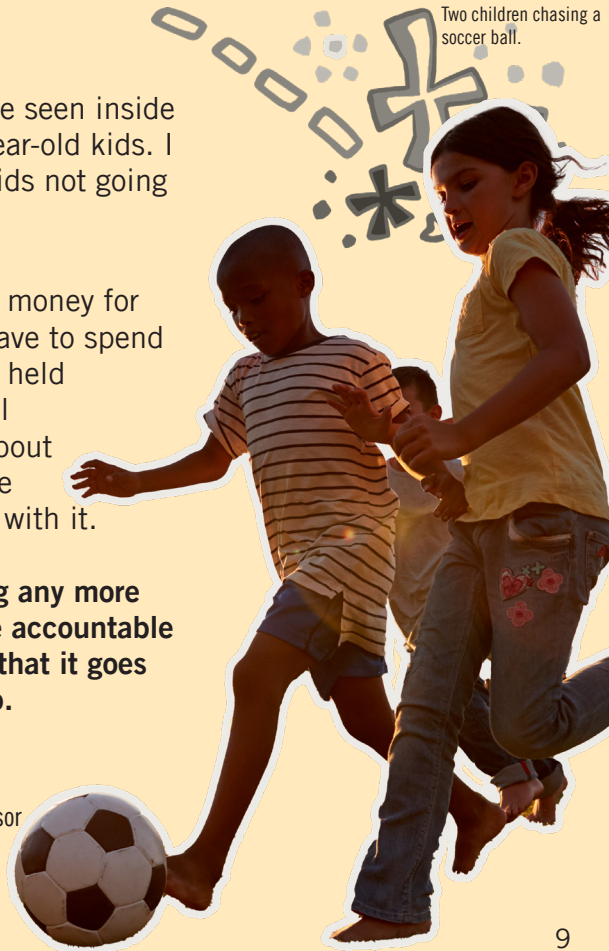
When the state government gets money for Aboriginal housing, they don't have to spend the money on housing. No one's held accountable because the Federal Government makes a decision about where it goes, and then the State Governments do what they want with it.

We're not talking about spending any more money, but we're making people accountable for the money that is spent and that it goes to where they say it's going to go.

RODNEY DILLON

Proud Palawa Elder and
Amnesty International Indigenous Rights Advisor

Two children chasing a soccer ball.



WHAT ABOUT PREVIOUS ADVISORY BODIES?

The five previous First Nations advisory bodies weren't enshrined in the Constitution, and so were easily abolished by successive Governments. Many First Nations People continue to experience ongoing disadvantage due to the instability of cancelled programs, policies and investments.

DO OTHER COUNTRIES HAVE SOMETHING SIMILAR?

Yes! Norway, Sweden and Finland all have a First Nations Parliament, with authority over some issues and a right to be consulted over legislation that affects them. In Aotearoa New Zealand, the Parliament has seven seats reserved for Māori People. Both of these mechanisms allow Indigenous Peoples to have a voice in the processes of government.

HOW IS THE VOICE DIFFERENT TO ELECTING FIRST NATIONS MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT?

First Nations Members of Parliament are elected to represent their electorates - their geographical areas - and they usually represent a political party. The Voice will be an independent body that listens to all Indigenous communities and provides advice to Parliament on issues specific to Indigenous communities.

WHY WILL THE EXACT DESIGN OF THE VOICE COME AFTER THE REFERENDUM?

This allows for the details about the Voice to be decided through normal parliamentary procedures, and changed by Parliaments over time as required. **Constitutional experts have agreed that this is most appropriate and in line with past referendums.**

A great example is the 1946 Referendum, which asked Australians if the Constitution should be changed to introduce vital social services like medical and hospital benefits. The exact design of the benefits - how much they would cost, how they would be shared - was decided by Parliament after the successful referendum. This meant the Government could adjust social service programs to meet the needs of Australians as the world evolved.

If the details of the social services were embedded in the Constitution back in 1946, the only way to make important changes would be to hold another referendum.

LEARN ABOUT THE DESIGN PRINCIPLES

The Government, together with the Referendum Working Group has released a set of principles that will guide the design of the Voice to ensure it is representative of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, gender-balanced and includes youth.

READ MORE > [ULURUSTATEMENT.ORG/EDUCATION/DESIGN-PRINCIPLES](https://ulurustatement.org/education/design-principles)



INDIGENOUS RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS

Like us, you believe no one should ever be held back, targeted or disadvantaged in any way because of their background. We believe Australia can and should be a just and inclusive society that values equality for all.

Human rights are universal, but right now in Australia, they are not equally upheld.

For hundreds of years, systems brought here through colonisation have led to social and economic disadvantages for First Nations People.

Closing the Gap research has highlighted serious inequalities, like:

- Indigenous babies are twice as likely to die in the first 28 days since birth, compared to non-Indigenous babies
- Indigenous People have a significantly shorter life expectancy compared to non-Indigenous people
- The rate for suicide among Indigenous People is twice the rate of non-Indigenous People.

READ MORE > [CLOSINGTHEGAP.GOV.AU/NATIONAL-AGREEMENT/TARGETS](https://closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/targets)

MY WHOLE LIFE I HAVE SEEN THE CONSEQUENCES OF LAWS AND POLICIES THAT DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECT FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE. FOR MANY, IT IS ACROSS EVERY FACET OF OUR LIVES: EDUCATION, HEALTHCARE, HOUSING AND THROUGH THE LEGAL SYSTEM.

Kacey Teerman, proud Gomerai woman and Amnesty International Indigenous Rights Campaigner



CASE STUDY: RAISE THE AGE

In Australia, children as young as 10 can be put in prison. This mainly affects Indigenous kids who are locked up for offences for which non-Indigenous kids typically aren't.

It tears Indigenous kids away from their families, denies them a proper education and puts them at even more of a disadvantage compared to non-Indigenous kids.

These kids are so young they still have baby teeth and still use booster seats in cars.

Overwhelming evidence from health experts, social workers and legal experts shows that sending young children to prison results in even worse outcomes.

Evidence shows that community-led justice reinvestment and diversion programs are much more effective.

Kids who participate in these programs are far more likely to remain out of jail and in their communities, and get back to school.

Despite this evidence, there's a record amount of money being spent on prisons, and very little being spent on programs that actually work.

This is exactly the type of issue that the Voice would advise the Government on and exactly the type of issue where advice from First Nations leaders would make a difference.



WHY SUPPORT A VOICE TO PARLIAMENT?

BETTER QUALITY INFORMATION

A Voice will mean the Government will have better quality information about First Nations communities and issues, delivered directly from the communities themselves.

BETTER LAWS AND POLICIES

Information from communities will result in better quality laws and policies and targeted investment that will make a real difference in the lives of First Nations People.

BETTER OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

This means practical and realistic solutions that will close the gaps in areas like health, employment and education.

BETTER FUTURE FOR ALL AUSTRALIANS

All of us deserve to live in a country where everyone, regardless of their background, has the same opportunity to thrive and live long and happy lives.

“

**WHEN WE CAN HAVE A SAY
IN WHAT AFFECTS US, THEN
WE CAN GET OUTCOMES. IT'S
RESPECTFUL AND CULTURALLY
APPROPRIATE.**

Rodney Dillon, proud Palawa Elder and Amnesty International Indigenous Rights Advisor

An activist stands in front of a crowd with their fist in the air and the Aboriginal flag flying above them. © Cameron Durbin

HOW CAN I HELP?



One of the most powerful things you can do is have conversations with friends, family and your neighbours. By speaking out, you can give others an opportunity to learn and reflect. You're also standing up for what you believe in - empathy, compassion and fairness.

It's important to be open and understanding. Just like you, most people are seeking out different sources of information because they care about what they vote for.

That's why sharing your knowledge and perspective with the people close to you can be so impactful.

Having these conversations can feel awkward and uncomfortable but there are different ways to respond depending on the situation and the people around you. Throughout this guide we've included some commonly asked questions. Here are some tips on how to have effective conversations:



TIP 1

Avoid questions that seem accusatory, like “Why would you think that?” These questions tend to make people feel defensive and they may treat the situation as a conflict rather than a discussion. Instead, try acknowledging their perspective before offering an alternative viewpoint. You could say: “There's some misinformation out there, I can see how you thought that”.

TIP 2

Appeal to shared values of respect, fairness and unity. Try saying: “I hear you, I also believe that we all deserve to be treated with respect and dignity, no matter our background. The Voice would actually help create a fairer, more unified Australia by helping to address historic and systemic disadvantage faced by First Nations People since colonisation”.



TIP 3

Lecturing someone or making them feel guilty can shut down the conversation. **Try using 'I' statements to gently correct them.** You could say: “I’ve realised it’s pretty hurtful to say that” or “I’ve actually learnt that’s not true”.

TIP 4

Appeal to empathy by **talking about people, rather than just numbers or statistics.** Ultimately, the results of this referendum will tangibly affect the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People and communities. It’s important to keep the human impact in focus while talking about the Voice.

TIP 5

Focus on the strengths of First Nations-led solutions. You can say: “We know that when First Nations people have steered the policies to address youth incarceration, such as community-led justice reinvestment programs, kids are far more likely to remain out of the criminal justice system, and instead connected to their community and attending school”.

Keep in mind that you don’t always have to respond in the moment. If you’re in a group situation, you can consider if it would be more effective to talk to someone in a private setting. Later, you can say to them: “Hey, something you said earlier has been on my mind, can we have a chat about it?”

Every conversation and every effort has an impact.

By creating a space for others to ask questions and learn more about the Voice, you can help to bring more people along, towards a better future for the whole country.



REMEMBER!

If the conversation gets heated or keeps escalating, remove yourself from the situation. Your safety matters. It’s okay to pick your battles.

LET'S BUILD A BETTER FUTURE

“I can see the future that is possible, like having Aboriginal languages taught to kids in school. Imagine the whole school singing an Aboriginal song together. I think that's the role of the Voice. **It'll be about how we bring people together and move forward as one.**”



Kacey Teerman. © Amnesty International

THE VOICE IS NOT ONLY A WAY FOR US TO ACHIEVE LIFE-CHANGING OUTCOMES. IT'S ALSO AN OPPORTUNITY TO COME TOGETHER AND UNDERSTAND THE REAL HISTORY OF THIS COUNTRY.

Rodney Dillon. © AI/Pablo Barnes



“When people think of truth-telling, they think of atrocities - the Frontier Wars, Stolen Generations, massacres - which continue to have a significant effect on Indigenous People. But to me, truth-telling isn't just about the sad things. There is so much positive history to celebrate. Indigenous People had trade routes, advanced farming techniques, and amazing inventions that were thousands of years ahead of their time.

This is our shared history.”

MORE WAYS YOU CAN SUPPORT FIRST NATIONS RIGHTS

TAKE ACTION



Take the pledge and let people know you're voting YES — action.amnesty.org.au/act-now/pledge-to-vote-yes-to-the-voice

Sign the petition to protect the Torres Strait with climate action — action.amnesty.org.au/act-now/protect-the-torres-strait-with-climate-action

WATCH



In My Blood It Runs — Documentary film following 10-year-old Arrernte and Garawa Aboriginal boy, Dujuan.

SBS NITV — TV channel promoting greater understanding of First Nations cultures among all Australians.

Q&A clip with Meyne Wyatt — Monologue from his play, City of Gold.

DO



Volunteer with Yes23 — yes23.com.au/volunteer

Go to local events and rallies — yes23.com.au/events

Sign your organisation up to be an Allies for Uluru Coalition member — alliesforuluru.antar.org.au/join-us

READ



Uluru Statement from the Heart — ulurustatement.org/the-statement/

Dark Emu — Bruce Pascoe re-examines colonial accounts of Aboriginal Australians.

Growing up Aboriginal in Australia — A biographical anthology by Anita Heiss.

LISTEN



Frontier War Stories — Podcast dedicated to truth-telling about a side of Australian history left out of the history books.

SBS NITV Radio — News, events and issues that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Speaking Out — Podcast on politics, arts and culture from Indigenous perspectives.

FAMILY FRIENDLY RESOURCES



Finding Our Heart — Storybook about the Uluru Statement by Thomas Mayo.

The First Scientists — Illustrated science book by Corey Tutt of DeadlyScience.

Our Home, Our Heartbeat — Celebrate past and present First Nations legends with Adam Briggs.

CONTENT WARNING: may contain images or names of people who have passed away.





From all of us at Amnesty International Australia, thank you so much for taking the time to learn more about the 2023 Referendum for the Voice to Parliament.

Thank you for showing how compassionate you are, and that you care about equality and justice, not just for some but for all.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People have asked the nation to support the Voice, to help inform efforts to protect human rights, to see kids thrive at school, families access housing and opportunity, and for Elders to live longer healthier lives.

We have a vital role to play in securing this opportunity for First Nations People to better advise on the decisions made about their lives, now and for generations to come.

Thank you again for your kindness. Caring people like you are making the future brighter for everyone.

[amnesty.org.au/campaigns/the-voice/](https://www.amnesty.org.au/campaigns/the-voice/)

We'd like to hear from you as well. If you'd like to share any feedback on this guide, or tips and stories of your own, please get in touch with us at supporter@amnesty.org.au.

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DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS

**CHALLENGE
INJUSTICE.**