

## **REFERENDUM COUNCIL**

### **Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples**

**COMMUNIQUE, 14 DECEMBER 2015**

The Referendum Council, appointed by the Prime Minister, the Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP, and the Leader of the Opposition, the Hon Bill Shorten MP, met in Sydney today, 14 December 2015, for its first meeting. The Council was announced on 7 December 2015.

The Council comprises sixteen Australians, and includes eight Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and eight non-Indigenous Members. Eight members are women; eight are men. Members have a range of backgrounds and bring different and important experiences and expertise to the table.

The Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition joined the Council at the start of its meeting. They discussed progress that has been made to date, the task before the Council, and the potential for constitutional recognition to make a significant contribution to Australia.

The Referendum Council Co-Chairs, Professor Patrick Dodson and Mr Mark Leibler AC, welcomed the shared, bipartisan commitment of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition to recognition. Their leadership and commitment will be critical on the path ahead.

The Co-Chairs also welcomed the shared commitment of all state and territory governments to recognition, which was reaffirmed by all Premiers and Chief Ministers at the Council of Australian Governments meeting on 11 December 2015.

The Referendum Council discussed the need for constitutional recognition to be progressed as part of a broader conversation that addresses concerns among Indigenous communities about Indigenous affairs and the settlement of 'unfinished business'.

The Referendum Council considers that consultation and community engagement is paramount. There have, to date, been two exhaustive processes with over 260 public meetings and over 3600 submissions.

There needs to be opportunities for all Australians to have their voices heard. This could commence with a digital platform, which will provide more information on options, and submissions and discussions will be encouraged.

As options are further distilled, community meetings or conferences could occur to get views on the proposition.

Given the importance of ensuring the proposition reflects the wishes of Indigenous Australians, a series of Indigenous-designed and led consultations will also occur.

The Referendum Council determined that an initial step will be the development of an information pack that will guide consultations and discussions. This information pack should provide a narrative about the contribution that recognition can make to Australia's national identity, and detail the various options for constitutional reform.

Further details will be announced in the near future.