

REFERENDUM COUNCIL

Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

COMMUNIQUE, 10 MAY 2016

The Referendum Council, appointed by the Prime Minister, the Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP, and the Leader of the Opposition, the Hon Bill Shorten MP, held its fourth meeting in Melbourne today.

The Council has agreed to a thorough and inclusive process for consulting Australians, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, about recognising Indigenous peoples in the Constitution.

Indigenous leadership meetings

The Council will commence its consultation process with three significant meetings with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders, including traditional owners and representatives of peak bodies.

At these Indigenous leadership meetings, participants will discuss constitutional recognition and the process of consulting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples about options for recognition.

Indigenous, community-wide and digital consultations

The Council will conduct a concurrent series of Indigenous consultations and community-wide consultations in the second half of 2016. The Council will also lead a national conversation on recognition through an innovative digital platform that gives all Australians the chance to have their say.

These consultations will include a series of regional dialogues for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to discuss options for a referendum proposal that could be supported by Indigenous peoples.

All Australians will have the opportunity to contribute to the national discussion. At the same time as the Indigenous meetings, the Council will provide opportunities for all Australians to have their say through a range of online discussions on constitutional recognition. The Council will also hold community consultations in each State and Territory across Australia.

Consultation framework

The Council has also agreed on elements of potential referendum proposals that should form the basis of consultations:

- addressing the sections of the Constitution, including section 25 and section 51(xxvi), that are based on the outdated notion of 'race',
- ensuring continued capacity for the Commonwealth Government to make laws for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples,
- formally acknowledging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of Australia,

- providing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander body to advise Parliament about matters affecting Indigenous peoples, and
- providing a constitutional prohibition on racial discrimination.

Timeframe

The Indigenous leadership meetings will begin in June. The regional dialogues, community-wide and digital consultations will take place in the second half of 2016.

The Council is confident that the decisions made today are an important step towards constitutional recognition.

The Co-Chairs will seek the approval of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition to continue the Council's work throughout the caretaker period.

The Council has set out a considered process for respectful and inclusive consultations and discussions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider Australian community about constitutional reform. This is an exciting opportunity for all Australians to have their say and create the foundations for a successful referendum.

The Council will step through this process carefully and deliver its Final Report to the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition following the conclusion of the consultations.

For media enquiries contact the Referendum Council Co-Chairs Mark Leibler and Pat Anderson through media@pmc.gov.au or call (02) 6271 6039.