

## **The Voice and the ULURU statement from the heart – RAP Committee Chairperson Gary Crierie.**

Earlier this year I was privileged to take part in a yarn with Co-Chairs of the Uluru Statement from the Heart Pat Anderson AO <sup>1</sup> and Megan Davis<sup>2</sup> United Nations Human Rights Lawyer, UNSW Professor and pro-vice chancellor. There was discussion about our history, the similarities and differences with other colonised countries such as USA, Canada and others and the processes of recognition, self-determination, treaties and truth telling.

I also had the opportunity to visit First Nations museums in Canada and Washington DC and saw the effectiveness and otherwise of treaties. Both kept and broken.

What we do know is that treaties take time and in the meanwhile there is still a significant difference in the lives and life of First Nations peoples when compared to dominant culture (mainstream) people.

## **The Uluru Statement from the Heart outlines the path forward for recognising Indigenous Australians in the nation's constitution.**

It was unanimously endorsed by 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders on May 26, 2017, following a four-day First Nations National Constitutional Convention held at Uluru.

The consultation process that led to the statement was unprecedented in Australian history for its scale. A Referendum Council, appointed by then-prime minister Malcolm Turnbull and recently departed Labor leader Bill Shorten, was tasked with charting the next steps for constitutional reform in 2015. Over a six month period, it engaged more than 1200 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives in a dozen regional dialogues across the country.

The initial intention was to have over 35 regional /local dialogues but funding did not allow. The facilitators of the dialogues were trained to ensure everyone at the gatherings had a voice and that no-one was silenced by stronger voices. Each dialogue had to come to a unanimous agreement on their resolutions before forwarding to the Uluru convention.

Read the full Uluru statement and the summary here <sup>3</sup> <https://ulurustatement.org/the-statement/view-the-statement>

Also, see all the regional dialogue reports here [The Dialogues - Uluru Statement from the Heart](#)

There is a genuine opportunity to effect change and set our country on a path to healing and inclusion. What we know at present is that despite a lot of money spent there is a significant gap in the health outcomes of First Nations people in our country <sup>4</sup>. There is a significant difference in the education and life experiences and opportunities for First Nations people in our country.

There is a serious lack of knowledge or recognition of the true history of settlement of this great nation. We were taught at school that Australia was declared by the British colonialists as “ Terra

Nullius”, yet we know that for between 40, 000 and 70, 000 years this land was both inhabited and nations established with complex and established customs and processes.

Travel to the beautiful Kimberley and Pilbara but see where both local First Nations people were rounded up in chains and forced to work in the pearling industry. See the history of Wadjemup (Rottneest island) for other examples of enslaved First Nations people. State records indicate that 3,700 Aboriginal men and boys were imprisoned at Wadjemup between 1838 and 1931. There were children as young as eight and adults as old as 70; many were leaders, lore men and warriors, and the removal from their communities had lasting effects.

“With the loss of their leaders, many Aboriginal communities across Western Australia also lost their role models, decision-makers, and cultural historians — the lore men and Elders who gave guidance and passed on important knowledge. As a result, many Aboriginal communities were forced to merge, putting untenable pressure on the remaining leaders due to tribal differences and over-stretched populations.”<sup>5</sup>

A brief reminder of our history timeline:

1770: Cook lands Botany Bay and claims Australia for the crown under “terra nullius” basis so that Britain did not need to defeat and conquer the land owners

1901: Australian Constitution

1938: Day of mourning protest for Australian Parliament representation and the right to vote

1944-67: WA Aboriginal people could apply for citizenship which could be arbitrarily removed and Conditional on **denouncing their heritage**. Continued until 1971.

1967: Referendum questions including two relating to aboriginal People.

The first question (*Constitution Alteration (Parliament) Bill 1967*) sought to increase the number of Members in the [House of Representatives](#).<sup>[1]</sup> LOST

The second question (*Constitution Alteration (Aboriginals) Bill 1967*) related to [Indigenous Australians](#) (referred to as "the Aboriginal Race") and was in two parts: whether to give the [Federal Government](#) the power to make laws for Indigenous Australians in states, and whether in population counts for constitutional purposes to include all Indigenous Australians. PASSED

Aboriginal people in the NT were not permitted to vote.

1983: Commonwealth Electoral Amendment Act made it compulsory for Aboriginal people to vote as was the case already for other Australians.

2003: PM Rudd issues apology to stolen generations in parliament

2015: PM Malcolm Turnbull establishes Referendum Council to pursue ways to recognise First Nations people in the constitution.

2017: Uluru Statement from the Heart formulated and presented to PM Turnbull who rejects proposal

2023: PM Albanese proposes referendum to enact the Uluru statement by an enshrined VOICE to parliament in the constitution.

<sup>1</sup> **Patricia Audrey Anderson AO** is an Australian [human rights](#) advocate and health administrator. An [Alyawarre](#) woman from the [Northern Territory](#), she is well known internationally as a [social justice](#) advocate, advocating for improved health, educational, and protection outcomes for [Indigenous Australian](#) children.

<sup>2</sup> **Megan Jane Davis** is an [Aboriginal Australian](#) activist and international [human rights](#) lawyer. She was the first [Indigenous Australian](#) to sit on a [United Nations](#) body, and was Chair of the [UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues](#). Davis is Pro vice-Chancellor, Indigenous, and [Balnaves Chair in Constitutional Law](#) at the [University of New South Wales](#). Excerpt from Wikipedia:

<sup>3</sup> <https://ulurustatement.org/the-statement/view-the-statement>

<sup>4</sup> Closing the gap. <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au>

<sup>5</sup> Wadjemup History <https://www.rotnnestisland.com/learn/history/aboriginal-history>