

**A GUIDE FOR MEMBERS AND FRIENDS  
OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND**  
*for purposefully participating in  
the 2023 Referendum on “the Voice” to Parliament.*



*(A representation of the LCA NZ Logo by Central Australian Indigenous Lutheran artist, Ruth Cook:  
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**Acknowledgement of Country**

The Lutheran Church of Australia acknowledges that our loving Creator God first gave the land on which we are placed, to the peoples of the First Nations who have walked and cared for this land since before recorded time. We thank God for the land's Traditional Custodians and pay our respects to Elders past, present, and emerging as we travel this journey of reconciliation in Australia.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Engaging with The Voice: Referendum

In 2017 the Uluru Statement from the Heart was drafted. In it, First Peoples invited all Australians to 'walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future'.

As Lutheran people, we recognise the intention to bring agency to Indigenous People through 'The Voice'. This material has been prepared to help the people of the Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand to faithfully and purposefully participate in the 2023 Referendum.

### 1.2 A Guiding Voice from Rev Rex Rigby

Rex serves as the National Superintendent of the Wesleyan Methodist Church of Australia and he is the only Indigenous First Nations Head of a Church in the National Council of Churches of Australia.

At the June meeting of the NCCA, Rev Rigby shared a pivotal message, 'A vote in favour might see only a slight improvement in the situation for Indigenous Australians, but a vote against has the potential to be a step backwards and cause further struggles for Indigenous Australians.'

### 1.3 Our Lutheran Church and RAP (Reconciliation Action Plan)

The proposed 'Voice' does not replace the Australia-wide conversations about reconciliation.

The LCA has a long and positive history in ministry to and with First Peoples in a number of places in Australia in different LCA districts. At the 2015 Convention of Synod, the LCA resolved to launch the 50.500 project which was designed to deliver special ministry projects in thanksgiving for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the LCA (2016) and the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation (2017). One of the specific project areas was to 'Hear the Indigenous Voice'. As a key part of this project, a reference group of senior First Peoples Christians was established to guide the project team. This group included Lutherans Andrea Mason OAM (Central Australia), Noel Pearson (Qld), and Shona Reid (SA).

At the 2018 Convention of Synod, the LCA voted overwhelmingly to prepare a Reconciliation Action Plan. This plan has been developed and approved by Reconciliation Australia. It is found on the official website of the LCA.

[Our Progress – Relationships - Reconciliation Action Plan \(lca.org.au\)](https://www.rap.lca.org.au/our-progress-relationships/)

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### 1.4 From the LCA NZ College of Bishops:

The College of Bishops met in August 2023 to finalise this guide for members of the church.

The College of Bishops ask their sisters and brothers of the Lutheran Church to carefully consider the materials in the package and other guides available from the National Council of Churches and from state and non-government organisations. (Links to various resources are in this guide.)

The College of Bishops resolved to highlight to the people of the church, the significance of this referendum in this history of our nation, and of the call from so many of our indigenous sisters and brothers, to take up the 'Yes' vote. Materials from various Indigenous voices are included in this guide.

The College of Bishops urge the people of the church to actively participate in both the debate and in the referendum itself when it is conducted later in the year.

## **2. SOME VOICES FROM OUR SISTERS AND BROTHERS IN OUR AUSTRALIAN LUTHERAN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES**

### **2.1 Some Things to Reflect on about Lutheran Activity in the Preparation for the Referendum:**

- Our Lutheran Leaders, Rev John Heffernan and Lavinia Heffernan are providing translation work for to give clear Referendum information for people who speak the Luritja language.
- The Central Land Councils of the Northern Territories, which include peoples of the Lutheran Church, have consulted with community elders and given support for the Voice to Parliament and they have asked the nation to appreciate this resolution.
- The Ngaanyatjarra-Pitjantjatjara-Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women's Council, based in Alice Springs but covering all the Western Desert communities and includes people of the Lutheran Church, after consultation with the Female Elders of this region, is also supporting the voice.
- Two of the leading Indigenous campaigners for the Voice are Lutheran people: Noel Pearson – a key architect of the Voice proposal and Uluru Statement and Andrea Mason OAM (former CEO of NPY, member of the Alice Springs Lutheran Church, and currently a Commissioner on the Royal Commission into Disability).

### **2.2 The following content is from people of our Lutheran Communities speaking specifically about the Referendum Matters:**

#### **2.2.1 Andrea Mason OAM**

(Royal Commissioner for Disability Royal Commission) from the Kronie and Ngaanyatjarra communities in Central Australia also with connections with the Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara communities.

'For me the Voice and recognition is based on a good model in Central Australia. This idea is the model of NPY Women's Council (NPYWC), but on a bigger scale. Three jurisdictions with NPYWC members living in WA, SA and the NT, they have different conditions because of different state and territory policies and funding. But on issues in remote areas, such as employment, mental health, disability and aged care and education the members from the three jurisdictions speak about solutions with one voice. And through consensus and discussion the members have found solutions to address harmful substance misuse such as alcohol and petrol sniffing. So I can see it happening at the national level too.

The ideas the Voice will suggest will be ideas we can support and get behind. We will hold ourselves accountable as well, it won't be a one-way street.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are 3% of the Australian people. To get our ideas and solutions heard in Parliament today just takes too long and in the meantime problems get bigger, meanwhile solutions are not progressing. The Voice I believe has the potential to be the best grassroots consumer adviser in regards to this.

We can work through our issues as brothers and sisters.'

#### **2.2.2 Shona Reid**

(Guardian for Children and Young People SA) and former Exec Officer for Reconciliation SA from the Eastern Arrernte communities in Central Australia.

'For years I've had people talk to me about wanting to do something, wanting to play their bit for our nations future and right the wrongs from generations before.

To this point we (all Australians) have relied on people in power, people in authority to make decisions and exercise their judgement to guide our nation and it's citizens. We keep doing the same thing over and over again. Without any real and meaningful change coming into effect for First Peoples right across this nation, which in turn means no real change for our wider society.

In continuing this cycle, we have forgotten a few very simple and humble rules:

- \* To look not only at our own interest, but also to the interests of others
- \* To listen and hear from those whose interests are beyond our own
- \* To exercise comradely and not rivalry in attainment of these shared interests

This upcoming referendum seeks to create an opportunity to exercise such wisdom and humility.

The Voice to Parliament is just this,

- \* an opportunity for First Peoples and the wider Australian community to share in each other's interests as comrades and not rivals
- \* an opportunity for First People to share and for the wider Australian community to listen
- \* an opportunity to get change right because we are comrades and we listen
- \* an opportunity for you to do your bit in the healing and advancement of our Nation.'

### **2.2.2 Noel Pearson**

Founder of Cape York Partnership; design partner of the Australian Government's "Indigenous voice to government"; and Lawyer from the Guugu Yimithirr community of Hope Vale, Far North Queensland.

'My mission has a long history with the Lutherans who settled the Barossa and the hinterlands of Adelaide: they are truly, my people. My Guugu Yimithirr and Kuku Yalanji people of eastern Cape York Peninsula share a fundamental layer of identity with these migrants: we share a history dating back to Martin Luther's reformation in 1517 Germany, based in the conviction God's grace alone saves us.

... I foreswear any moral appeal to all except those of my faith: a small group of Australians whose vote in this referendum means so much to my Bama: my people. Our church is somewhat at odds with its liberal theological core precluding grace to none – whose members are susceptible to the obscurantism and myopia of reactionary politics.

I say to you my brothers and sisters: this is the time to bring the true meaning of faith, hope and love to your deliberation of this referendum. Your black family are too well acquainted with the moral reckoning of suffering, forgiveness, redemption and atonement for you to reject the hand of love proffered by the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

If I claim leadership of any community it is of our moral community: the mantle of which I claim by virtue of my grandfather's removal to the Cape Bedford Lutheran Mission as a boy, and his bequest of faith to his son, my father, who bequeathed the same to me. Now is not the time for Peter's denial in Gethsemane. If we are denied by anyone, let it not be our own family in Christ. Reconciliation after all lies at the heart of the Gospel our old missionaries brought to us.

Now is the time for courage and testimony rather than cowardice and dissembling. I attach a one-page summation of my views about the importance of the Voice and this referendum. I hope you can provide this to our church leaders.'

### **2.3 Far North Queensland First Peoples Lutheran Community (see original as appendix)**

This is a Call to Action from Hope Vale Lutheran Church to all LCA Congregations to stand in solidarity for Reconciliation, and support the 2023 Referendum for Recognition through Voice.

'We at the Hope Vale Lutheran Church Congregation pledge our full and unwavering support for the Uluru Statement from the Heart and its invitation to all Australians to create a better nation through constitutional recognition through voice, treaty making and truth telling.

The Lutheran Church originally established the community in 1886 as the Cape Bedford Mission at Elim Beach. During World War II the military interned the German Lutheran missionaries and the population evacuated to southern communities such as Woorabinda. In September 1949 Hope Vale was re-established as a Lutheran Mission and the first families returned in 1950.

The Lutheran Church provided Christian structures, principles and moral values for family, community connectedness, and education for all. These were very strongly believed and upheld.

Our Christian values remain and we vividly know and see the need for Recognition through Voice that will enable our people to play an active role in determining their destiny. A Voice at a local level will provide our people an opportunity to influence development solutions, and the programs and policies necessary for individual, family and community healing.

For four decades Guugu Yimithirr people and historical owners have been powerless to affect important matters affecting us, as our lives and community has been 'operated' by governments. Our declining education, family wellbeing, language and culture, employment, our health, and our economic prosperity have been the subject of many government reports, and well-intentioned government- led remedies. The status quo, the downward trajectory, can no longer be accepted.

First Nations people finally have an opportunity to be heard, to take responsibility and design their future. We know that giving local leaders and our families a greater say on matters which affect them will lead to more effective outcomes for our people and our community.

So now, we write with a great sense of urgency, to all LCA congregations, just weeks out from a Referendum, that will provide for all Australians the great opportunity to better our democracy by finally recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the most important rule book in the land. After 235 years our people will finally be accepted as first peoples belonging to this nation.

For Indigenous Australians, this is a tipping point, and for the psyche of our country to shift towards kindness towards us by supporting us to change our future. We urge LCA congregations to come together with your families, friends, networks, for this important discussion.

We extend our support to you all. We offer to join any information session that may be needed to provide information and answer questions directly so that you are fully informed and confident in your conversations through your church services.

On behalf of Hope Vale Lutheran Church Council we say God Bless and thank you for uniting with us as sisters and brothers in Christ.'

Chair, June Pearson  
15<sup>th</sup> August 2023

### **3. SOME MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION**

#### **3.1 Christians Churches Respond.**

The National Council of Churches in Australia Website has collated guidance on the Referendum from various Christian Church bodies in Australia: [Churches on a Voice to Parliament - NCCA](#)

#### **3.2 New Zealand Lutherans and Te Reo Maori.**

New Zealanders, while not voting in this referendum, have for decades promoted positive acknowledgment of their indigenous people. It is not uncommon for NZ church leaders to use parts of the Maori language in formal settings such as church services and other community gatherings.

In the Lutheran Church of New Zealand for example, words in Te Reo Maori (the language of the Maori people) are used in worship services and under the leadership of Bishop Mark Whitfield, the Lutheran Church of New Zealand has come to value these openings, blessings and songs from the language of New Zealand's first people. Recently, when the New Zealand Church commissioned their Archives to be stored in Australia, Maori custom was drawn on to send and receive the Archival stories.

These small actions help create understanding and respect. The Lutheran Church and its Lutheran people have been actively involved in this engagement of promoting mutual respect which in turn has led to better relationships. The LCNZ now encourages us here in Australia to consider how this decision before us might help grow respect for our Australian indigenous people.

#### **3.3 Changing our Own Rules for the Indigenous Voice in the LCA.**

Our LCA recently changed its own processes for hearing the voice of Australian Lutherans. Since the Indigenous people of Central Australian Bush Communities did not constitute themselves as congregations in the traditional sense, they could not be congregations of the Synod and send elected delegates as their sisters and brothers in other places could elect and send delegates. At the Convention of General Synod in 2018, we changed the way we operate through a Synodical resolution, to allow the voice of Central Australian Lutheran communities.

#### **3.4 Some Guidance from Pastor Mark Winter, serving amongst the indigenous Communities of Hopevale, Wujal Wujal and Coen in Far North Queensland.**

("BAMA" means the people of the Indigenous Community in Far North Queensland)

1. 'The Bama acknowledge that it is not their right to tell anyone how they should vote. They simply want to share their views and desire that the members of the LCA would take their views into account when they consider how to vote.
2. They know that statistically first nations people only equate to a very small percentage of the population and yet they believe that their voice needs to be heard, especially within those issues where government decisions significantly affect them in their daily lives. It is believed that any effort to "close the gap" will be better advanced with solutions coming more directly from "grass roots" up, rather than from "top down". Whether the voice will or will not help that is debatable, however there is the view that it would be beneficial. They desire to call on their fellow Australians and especially their fellow church members to support them in this endeavour.
3. It must be noted that all communities (Hope Vale, Wujal Wujal and Coen) fully support the 'Uluru Statement from the Heart'. They believe that the voice is an important step for going forward with the intention of that statement.
4. While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are regularly recognised as the original caretakers of this land at many/most public events today, there is still no official recognition of that within the constitution and that is seen as an important step forward by the Bama.
5. It is still believed by many of the Bama, that there needs to be a willingness for "truth telling" of what has really happened within the history of Australia and opportunity given for local indigenous culture and language to be shared and learnt by all. This does not in any way take away from the influence that the Christian faith has had within these Christian communities.
6. The intention of the voice is not to create any special group within Australia, but rather it wants to be a way of developing and maintaining cooperative processes for working together in moving forward together into the future.

7. Many see this as an opportunity to stand in solidarity for Reconciliation and work towards dealing with many of the injustices of the past as we move together into the future.'

## **PART 4: BIBLE AND THEOLOGY – TOPICS FOR STUDY GROUPS**

(For Lutheran Christians considering matters such as a referendum in the ‘public arena’)

- 4.1 THE WORD OF THE LORD:** (The Word of the Lord will achieve the purposes for which the Lord sends it)  
What do the scriptures say about the matter?  
Is there any clear word of God?  
What matters promote God’s word?
- 4.2 PRAYER:** (We are commanded to pray to the one who hears our prayer)  
What would we pray for, when asking for the Lord’s guidance?  
What prayers of repentance should be spoken?  
What do we need to be thankful for?  
How do we join with others in praying to the Lord about the matter in the referendum?
- 4.3 BEING PURPOSEFULLY EVANGELICAL:** (We are sent to bear the good news of Jesus Christ - Matthew 28:16-20)  
What matters in this referendum can help promote to Gospel of Jesus?  
What matters in this referendum might prevent the Gospel being proclaimed or heard?
- 4.4 THE CREATION:** (God has created me and all that exists)  
We are on this earth to care for God’s creation. This includes the world and its people.  
What matters in this referendum help us to care for the people of God’s “good earth”?
- 4.5 PROMOTING LIFE:** (Jesus said, “I have come that you have life abundantly” John 10:10)  
The fifth commandment teaches “You shall not kill”. In the Small Catechism we learn, that this means that “we should fear and love God, and so we should not endanger our neighbour’s life, nor cause him any harm, but help and befriend him in every necessity of life.”  
What opportunities are in this referendum, to help our neighbours in their daily lives?
- 4.6 THE WAY OF LOVE:** (Jesus said, “Love one another as I have loved you.” John 13:34)  
How is this “new commandment” shown in the way we take up this Referendum?
- 4.7 THE TRUTH:** (Jesus said, “The Truth shall set you free”. John 8:31-32)  
The Eighth Commandment teaches us, “You shall not bear false witness.” Dr Luther explained, “We should fear and love God, and so we should not tell lies about our neighbour, nor betray, slander, or defame him, but should apologize for him, speak well of him, and interpret charitably all that he does.” How do we discern between what is true in the campaigns for the “Yes Vote” or the “No Vote”?  
If a Christian should be careful not to speak poorly of those on either side of the campaign, then how can we help others discern the key points in the arguments on either side?
- 4.8 FREEDOM:**  
In his writing, “The Freedom of the Christian” from 1520, Dr Martin Luther wrote: “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”  
If we are serving others, then how would we respond to the referendum? If we are free ‘lords of all’ then how would we respond to the referendum?
- 4.9 CHURCH AND STATE:** (There is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Romans 13:1)  
Lutherans Teach that God rules in two “kingdoms” or realms: The Church and the World (State). Article 28 of our Lutheran “Augsburg Confession warns against mixing up or confusing these two authorities. For Church preaches the gospel and administers the sacraments. . . . It should not annul or disrupt secular law” and should obey those that God has set to rule over us. The Church should not “make or prescribe laws for the secular power concerning secular affairs.” The State should not be telling the Church how to preach the Gospel.

What does a government need to hear from Christians, in a referendum about adding the voice of indigenous people to the Constitution?

**4.10 Some further matters for consideration from Pastor Mark Winter who serves the First Nations Lutheran Communities in Far North Queensland:**

- 1) As followers of Jesus we are called to care for the vulnerable; is the "Voice" about seeing "justice" done where "injustice" may have been the case in the past?
- 2) Will responses be well thought through and made in partnership with local communities and local people?
- 3) How can there be transparent consultation and listening at all levels of government?
- 4) How can we witness to God's love for all when deciding on our response to this referendum?
- 5) Is there a risk of making or supporting false promises when working through the "for" and "against" in relation to the "Voice" referendum?

## 5. Indigenous voice referendum study guide

# STUDY GUIDE

Prepared for the LCA NZ by Nick Schwarz Assistant to the Bishop Public Theology

### Introduction

Later this year, all Australian citizens aged 18 and over will be required to vote in a referendum. We will be asked to answer Yes or No to a proposal to 'alter the constitution to recognise the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice'. The proposed Voice would be an independent and permanent body for advising the federal parliament and government on matters that affect the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The government has launched an advertising campaign to inform Australians about the Voice and the questions they will be asked to answer. Groups advocating a Yes vote (i.e. Voice supporters) and groups advocating a No vote (i.e. Voice opposers) are also campaigning to try to convince us to side with them. Leaders of some churches have chosen to publicly advocate for a Yes vote. Other prominent Christians, including former prime minister Tony Abbott and former deputy prime minister John Anderson are advocating for a No vote. Further complicating the picture is the fact that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians can be found in the ranks of those opposed to, sceptical of, and undecided about the Voice. There is also evidence that many Australians still know little or nothing of the Voice proposal, including disadvantaged Aboriginal people in remote areas—the very people being said to be the principal beneficiaries of the Voice's work.

The LCA NZ Churchwide Office, the churchwide bishop and district bishops have received many requests from church members seeking guidance on voting in this referendum. The purpose of this guide is not to tell you whether to vote Yes or No, but to help prepare you to vote in an informed and responsible, God-pleasing way.

### Preparing to vote

#### Official pamphlets summarising the cases for and against the Voice

The official cases [for](#) and [against](#) the Voice proposal have now been posted on the Australian Electoral Commission website. In the weeks before the referendum hard copies will be mailed to every household in the country. Our task of weighing up the respective cases has unfortunately been made more difficult because spokespeople for both sides have accused each other of producing misleading propaganda. We will do well to assume, however, that both the Yes and No summaries were written by people with genuine concerns.

#### The Yes and No sides and their arguments

As well as screening ads on TV, the main groups advocating for a Yes vote and a No vote have websites you can browse to learn more about the people behind them and the arguments they are making.

#### The Yes side

The main organisation leading the Yes campaign is called '[Yes 23](#)'. Yes 23 is running a generally positive campaign, appealing to our goodwill and compassion and our sense of justice. The Yes side is keen to frame the referendum narrowly, as being about respect for Indigenous Australians and advancing equality by giving them a fairer say in matters that affect them. It is talking up the Voice's potential to help 'close the gaps', to foster greater understanding and cooperation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, and build a fairer, more just society. Some on the Yes side have also used negative tactics, warning that Indigenous Australians would perceive a No vote as a racist rejection and that the effect of a No vote on the reconciliation process would be disastrous. In some church settings, a No vote is being framed as unchristian.

As well as making its own case for a Yes vote, Yes 23 has prepared written statements addressing objections to the Voice proposal from their opponents on the No side, which you can read on this webpage [Yes 23: FAQs about the Referendum](#).

#### The No groups

The main organisation leading the No campaign is called 'Australians for Unity'. It is a merger of two groups, [Recognise a Better Way](#) and [Fair Australia](#). The No side is running a mainly negative campaign. While the No side is open to recognising Indigenous Australians in the constitution and supports the principle of Indigenous Australians having a fair say in matters that affect them, it says that by giving people with Indigenous ancestry 'additional' influence in Australian political life, the proposed Voice violates the principle of equality of all Australians. Hence the No side considers the proposed Voice unjust. They also consider it unwise because 'privileging one group of Australians over another would sow division'. All the No groups' major objections to the referendum Voice proposal can be found in these two booklets:

- Recognise a Better Way: [The Voice Model: The official position of Recognise a Better Way, The Voice No Case Committee](#)
- Fair Australia: [One Together, Not Two Divided: 10 reasons to vote "No" to the divisive Voice](#)

Recognise a Better Way and Fair Australia aim to widen voters' view so that they perceive the Voice as being about more than just respect for Indigenous Australians and giving them a fair say, e.g.

- that the Voice will fundamentally alter the structure of our democracy and adversely affect government efficiency, race relations and national unity, and
- that Indigenous leaders regard the Voice as merely the first phase of a longer-term project to increase Indigenous political power, negotiate treaties and make non-Indigenous Australians pay for harms linked to colonisation.

Further complicating the campaign picture is the presence of a 'Progressive No' group, which has no relationship with Recognise a Better Way or Fair Australia and has very different goals. The Progressive No group is comprised of members of the 'Black Sovereign Movement' and its supporters. When this guide was written, the Progressive No group did not have a website or any formal position statements. The Progressive No group also appeals to justice in its opposition to the Voice, arguing that the Voice will be too weak to deliver proper justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Progressive Nos say much stronger measures are necessary for proper justice, such as formal acknowledgement of Indigenous sovereignty, formal rights of self-determination, rent payments for the occupation and use of Indigenous land, reserved senate seats, treaties, and reparations for suffering due to dispossession and other forms of detriment linked to colonisation. By openly calling for such measures, the Progressive No group affirms perceptions that Indigenous Australians have a bigger 'Indigenous rights agenda' than just the Voice.

### **Summing up**

The groups campaigning for and against the Voice proposal all appeal to our sense of justice. However, they have different ideas about how justice is best served in the context of this referendum. What they mean when they say "justice for Indigenous Australians" also affects how they understand reconciliation and what will be necessary to advance it.

This referendum isn't bringing out the best in Australians. The more passionately we hold our views, one way or the other, the more we seem to be hostile towards or even contemptuous of people who see things differently. In our determination to demonstrate our righteousness we all reveal how broken by sin we are.

### **Pray**

As the referendum gets nearer and you consider how you will vote, pray not just for wisdom for yourself. Pray above all that regardless of the referendum outcome, Christians both non-Indigenous and Indigenous, will distinguish themselves by their hope, their generosity of spirit, and their openness to listening to and caring for their neighbours.

## **6. APPENDICES:**

6.1 Letter from Hopevale

6.2 NCCA Letter

6.3 Uluru Statement of the Heart

6.4 Many Eyes painting by Henry Reid



**LUTHERAN CHURCH**  
OF AUSTRALIA  
*where love comes to life*



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15<sup>th</sup> August, 2023

*This is a Call to Action from Hope Vale Lutheran Church to all LCA Congregations  
to stand in solidarity for Reconciliation, and support the 2023 Referendum for Recognition  
through Voice*

We at the Hope Vale Lutheran Church Congregation pledge our full and unwavering support for the Uluru Statement from the Heart and its invitation to all Australians to create a better nation through constitutional recognition through voice, treaty making and truth telling.

Lutheran Church originally established the community in 1886 as the Cape Bedford Mission at Elim Beach. During World War II the military interned the German Lutheran missionaries and the population evacuated to southern communities such as Woorabinda. In September 1949 Hope Vale was re-established as a Lutheran Mission and the first families returned in 1950.

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Our Christian values remain and we vividly know and see the need for Recognition through Voice that will enable our people to play an active role in determining their destiny. A Voice at a local level will provide our people an opportunity to influence development solutions, and the programs and policies necessary for individual, family and community healing.

For four decades Guugu Yimithirr people and historical owners have been powerless to affect important matters affecting us, as our lives and community has been 'operated' by governments. Our declining education, family wellbeing, language and culture, employment, our health, and our economic prosperity have been the subject of many government reports, and well intentioned government- led remedies. The status quo, the downward trajectory, can no longer be accepted.

First Nations people finally have an opportunity to be heard, to take responsibility and design their future. We know that giving local leaders and our families a greater say on matters which affect them will lead to more effective outcomes for our people and our community.

So now, we write with a great sense of urgency, to all LCA congregations, just weeks out from a Referendum, that will provide for all Australians the great opportunity to better our democracy by finally recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the most important rule book in the land. After 235 years our people will finally be accepted as first peoples belonging to this nation.

For Indigenous Australians, this is a tipping point, and for the psyche of our country to shift towards kindness towards us by supporting us to change our future. We urge LCA congregations to come together with your families, friends, networks, for this important discussion.

We extend our support to you all. We offer to join any information session that may be needed to provide information and answer questions directly so that you are fully informed and confident in your conversations through your Church services.

On behalf of Hope Vale Lutheran Church Council we say God Bless and thank you for uniting with us as sisters and brothers in Christ.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'June Pearson', written over a horizontal line.

**Chair, June Pearson**

## NCCA STATEMENT – ULURU STATEMENT FROM THE HEART and VOICE TO PARLIAMENT

### Giving strength to the voice of our First Peoples

The National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA) is committed to the churches working together for justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and for the healing of our peoples. We believe that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, nurtured and sustained by God for tens of thousands of years, are celebrated at the very heart of what it means to be Australian.

We support First Peoples through affirmation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart and focused indigenous ecumenical advocacy informed by our Indigenous Christian leaders.

Reverend John Gilmore, President of National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA), is a joint signatory to the Open Letter from Australia's leaders of major religious organisations to federal parliamentarians on 22 February 2023. The letter calls for support of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament as requested in the 2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart.

Australia's lands, skies and waterways will always belong to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The historic dispossession of their land is painful for Australia's First People and unsettling for all Australians. It has led, at times, to acrimony and polarisation.

The moving and rich 2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart concludes with an invitation:

*We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.*

Can we say 'Yes' to this invitation and walk together?

The Apostle Paul, in his First Letter to the Corinthians, has some guidance for Christians when he writes: *If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.* (1 Corinthians 12:26) There are seasons for both experiences. However, one's desire to celebrate must not ignore the reality of another's suffering.

We join our Indigenous brothers and sisters in their longing for an Australia where the pain and hurt of so many years is, in time, healed and we are all renewed.

In joining together with other religious leaders of Australia's major faith groups in an Open Letter to Parliamentarians in February 2023 and in a Joint Resolution on the 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Uluru Statement of the Heart in May 2022, NCCA's endorsement of the three requests of the Uluru Statement follows attentive listening to the voices, experiences and histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander Australians and our commitment to work for justice for First Nations peoples.

The Constitution Alteration (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice) Bill 2023 is to amend the Australian Constitution to recognise the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice.

This Bill is about recognising and listening.

We need to go back to Australia's founding federal document, the Constitution, and give recognition and a formal role in government to Australia's First Peoples. It is a just and reasonable path towards unity, reconciliation, and the healing of our nations.

Secondly, we have stated in our Open Letter to Federal Parliamentarians (2023) and in the Joint Resolution (2022) that NCCA supports the constitutional amendment establishing a Voice to Parliament and executive government.

There has been much work done on these matters over the past two decades, most commissioned by the Australian Government and undertaken by Indigenous and constitutional experts. We support their agreement, as expressed in the Uluru Statement of the Heart, that structural reform in the relationship between the Commonwealth Government and First Nations Peoples must start with constitutional establishment of the Voice.

NCCA also agrees with Indigenous leaders and other experts that this proposal will effectively respect parliamentary supremacy and uphold the Constitution, while empowering Indigenous communities with a Voice in their affairs.

Should the constitutional amendment be successful, it will be the Parliament that codifies the representation of the Voice and the nature and extent of the consultation of the Voice with Parliament and executive government. It is the Parliamentarians that can ensure that the First Nations Voice is consultative and its advice is non-binding. It is the Parliamentarians that can ensure that the Voice would have no veto power.

NCCA will continue to walk with our Indigenous brothers and sisters on the journey from Voice through to Treaty and Truth (Makarrata) requested in the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

The aspirations of First Nations Peoples are for an equitable relationship between First Nations and the people of Australia. NCCA supports change where it brings healing, wholeness, reconciliation and unity for our nations.

Constitutional recognition of the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice is the first step on the pathway for a fairer, more truthful, and better reconciled relationship between First Nations and the people of Australia.

ENDS – 14 June 2023

## ULURU STATEMENT FROM THE HEART

We, gathered at the 2017 National Constitutional Convention, coming from all points of the southern sky, make this statement from the heart:

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands, and possessed it under our own laws and customs. This our ancestors did, according to the reckoning of our culture, from the Creation, according to the common law from ‘time immemorial’, and according to science more than 60,000 years ago.

This sovereignty is *a spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land, or ‘mother nature’, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born therefrom, remain attached thereto, and must one day return thither to be united with our ancestors. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty.* It has never been ceded or extinguished, and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown.

How could it be otherwise? That peoples possessed a land for sixty millennia and this sacred link disappears from world history in merely the last two hundred years?

With substantive constitutional change and structural reform, we believe this ancient sovereignty can shine through as a fuller expression of Australia’s nationhood.

Proportionally, we are the most incarcerated people on the planet. We are not an innately criminal people. Our children are alienated from their families at unprecedented rates. This cannot be because we have no love for them. And our youth languish in detention in obscene numbers. They should be our hope for the future.

These dimensions of our crisis tell plainly the structural nature of our problem. This is *the torment of our powerlessness.*

We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take *a rightful place* in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.

We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution.

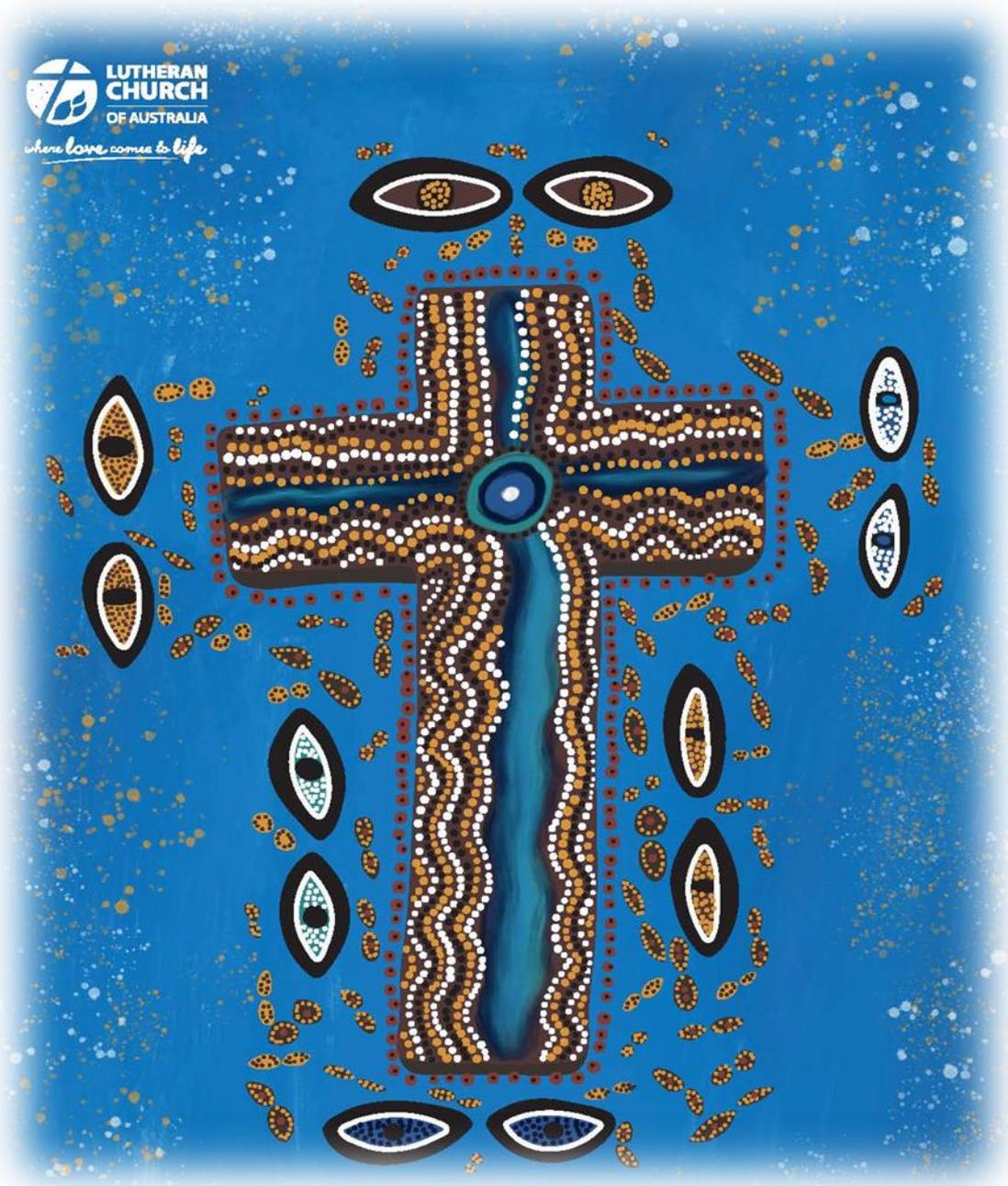
Makarrata is the culmination of our agenda: *the coming together after a struggle.* It captures our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination.

We seek a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history.

In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard. We leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country. We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.

# 'Many Eyes' Artwork

Inspiration of the LCA's Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)



This artwork (Many Eyes) is the handiwork of a young Aboriginal boy, Henry. Henry's family heritage extends to Eastern Aranda (North East of Alice Springs) and Wangkangurru (Simpson Desert SA) Henry was just 9 years of age in 2018, when he created this artwork. As part of a Reconciliation Week exercise in his school (a Lutheran school) Henry along with his class was asked what they understood by reconciliation. Henry said about his own painting, "It's about how there is one God and there are lots of people ... we are all different – that's a good thing - because we can all see different parts of God and share that with each other ... That way we can all learn from each other." This from the mouth of a 9 year old!

### **Many eyes, Many people, Many tasks:**

There are many eyes in Henry's art (79 pairs). These eyes represent that there are many thoughts, ideas and views about reconciliation. The many eyes represent the many people who have been on this journey of reconciliation – some for many years. At present the reconciliation journey has not reached its destination – these many eyes represent the many things yet to be done. There are many people who are needed to get these things done

### **Many Journeys:**

This striking use of the cross highlights that God makes a journey of reconciliation in the journey of Jesus Christ on earth, who goes to give his life for all on the Good Friday cross. As a result, all people are reconciled with God because of Christ's love and sacrifice. Isn't that the gospel? Our response is to engage in our own journey of reconciliation with each other. Now focus on the many coloured dots making up the cross .... what do you notice? Some who have been previously asked this question have suggested. Many different journeys of reconciliation have, or are yet to be travelled. True reconciliation journeys are travelled together, side by side, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people together as equals as God created us. Notice how the rows of dots are wavy and crooked – demonstrating that reconciliation journeys are rarely straight forward, we can expect bumps, potholes and barriers along the way– these bumps and diversions enriches the experiences, relationships and the outcomes of the journey. No journey of reconciliation is the same – each is different because each of us are unique – that is why sharing the journey with others is such an enriching experience. For genuine and sustained reconciliation we must be prepared to seek the Holy Spirit, to help us to embrace, effort and hard work over time ..... reconciliation is complex.

### **The blue palette:**

Notice the colour of the background on which the cross is laying. It is blue .... Some suggest that this represents all the peoples under sky for whom God sent his son Jesus to die, so that all peoples under the sky could be reconciled back to God – he paid the price. Jesus has walked that journey of reconciliation for you and for me and for all peoples .... So that we can work together to be reconciled with each other. Some have suggested that 'blue' represents the rivers and the oceans .... all water, one fresh and the other salt .... two distinct identities – but never the less each eventually connecting with each other .... Could this be the intersecting stories of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people ... rich stories which we share, and from which we learn to respect and value each other.

### **Flowing waters:**

Now focus on the darker blue and lighter blue colours up and across the centre of the cross. We've just talked about the blue representing the river and the sea. Notice how in their separate flows they meet .... at the centre of the cross and flow in those circles. Water is one of the elements of baptism .... it is in baptism that we receive our personal reconciliation with God through the cross of Christ ... the gift of the cross.

### **God's loving eye:**

Focus on the centre of the cross ... particularly that white dot, surrounded by those circles of blue – the river and the sea! Some have seen that this represents God's love for us all ... it is central to the cross. God's loving eye watching over each one of us as we make our choices in life .... ever calling us back to himself ... and the only place where we find true and lasting reconciliation.

### **Our witness:**

There are 'many eyes' observing us .... you and I who identify as children of God .... we are being watched from outside the 'church'. What do those 'outside' eyes see? What is our witness to others of our faith in the .... way we treat and care for each other? .... how we listen to each other? .... how we respect and speak to, and about, each other? .... how we bless and encourage each other? What is our witness of reconciliation to them?

*(Text from LCA NZ RAP Materials produced for the Church by Marilyn Wall)*