



PRESS RELEASE  
**FAITH LEADERS FOR THE VOICE**

21 September 2023

ANTaR Victoria, in collaboration with the Victorian Council of Churches and St Paul's Cathedral Melbourne, hosted this morning a media op to highlight the coalition of Christian faith leaders who support a First Nations Voice to Parliament.

The media op was live streamed and can be watched in full [here](#). A written copy of the faith leaders' statement is appended to this press release. Photos of the event are also appended.

A prayer service was held by the Very Revd Dr Andreas Loewe, Dean of Melbourne, Anglican Church of Australia. Proud Wirudjuri man Rev Canon Uncle Glenn Loughery, Anglican Church of Australia, gave an Acknowledgement of Country and read the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* in its entirety.

Fourteen attendees affirmed their support for a Yes vote in the upcoming referendum on Constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians through a Voice to Parliament. This can be seen from the 18:33 mark to the 21:20 mark in the recording. These persons were:

- John Gilmore, Churches of Christ Minister, President of National Council of Churches in Australia;
- Kim Kiessling, Senior Pastor of the German Lutheran Congregation East Melbourne;
- Sineke Martin, Clerk, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers);
- Katherine Jones, Deacon of Spiritual Nurture, Collins Street Baptist Church;
- Faye Yule, Wesley Uniting Church;

- Dr Petrina Barson, Community Church of St Mark (Clifton Hill Baptist Church);
- Rev David Fotheringham, Moderator of the Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania;
- Michelle Trebilcock, Chaplain, Brotherhood of St Laurence;
- Scott Holmes, Chaplain, Brotherhood of St Laurence;
- Sandy Yule, Wesley Uniting Church, Acting Convener of Melbourne City Churches in Action;
- Charlie Okapo, St Albans Uniting Church;
- Rev Rachel Kronberger, Minister, Wesley Church Melbourne;
- Dr Augustine Doronila, Co-Delegate of Focolare Movement of the Catholic Church; and
- Gemma Keogh, Youth Services Chaplain, The Salvation Army.

Please note that while some attendees represented their congregation or organisation, others spoke in a personal capacity only.

Eight attendees also read an abridged version of the joint resolution issued by the National Council of Churches of Australia. This can be seen from the 21:40 mark to the 27:09 mark in the recording.

ANTaR Victoria wishes to thank each of the faith leaders, and everyone else who attended today's event, including faith outreach volunteers for Melb4Yes, Claire Foley and Karen South. ANTaR Victoria also wishes to thank Rev (Deacon) Sandy Boyce, Executive Officer of the Victorian Council of Churches; George Bath, Yes23 Victorian Coordinator; Brenda McDermott, ANTaR Victoria Committee Member; Joel McFayden, St Paul's Cathedral secretary and assistant to the Dean; Rev Elizabeth Murray, Acting Precentor of St Paul's Cathedral; Elspeth Kerneborne, editor of *The Melbourne Anglican*; Nathanael Armstrong, St Paul's Cathedral events coordinator and assistant to the Precentor; and Susan Vincent, assistant to Rev Loughery.

Contact: Thomas Ponissi, ANTaR Victoria Campaign Coordinator ([tomANTAR23@gmail.com](mailto:tomANTAR23@gmail.com)) and Deb Hitchen, ANTaR Victoria Office Manager ([officemanager@antarvictoria.org.au](mailto:officemanager@antarvictoria.org.au)).

###

## **APPENDIX 1: STATEMENT**

*This statement is an abridged version of the [joint resolution](#) issued by the National Council of Churches in Australia in June 2023.*

We, as leaders of churches in Victoria, are committed to working together for justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. 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 are informed by the ecumenical advocacy of our Indigenous Christian leaders.

We accept the Uluru Statement from the Heart, and we support a constitutionally enshrined Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament.

The moving and rich 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." 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.

This referendum 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.

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.

We agree 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.

We 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. We support 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.

We say, Yes.

## APPENDIX 2: PHOTOS

Photo credit: Elspeth Kernebone.



