



**21 April 2023**

Committee Secretary Joint Select Committee on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice Referendum

PO Box 6201 Canberra ACT 2600

By Email: [jscvr@aph.gov.au](mailto:jscvr@aph.gov.au)

## **Re: Constitution Alteration (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice) 2023**

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Joint Select Committee on the *Constitution Alteration (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice Referendum) 2023*. First Peoples Disability Network (FPDN) has had an ongoing role in the movement for constitutional recognition of First Nations people in Australia. FPDN CEO, Damian Griffis represented FPDN in the Indigenous Voice co-design process, and is a current member of the Referendum Engagement Council. FPDN unreservedly supports the Commonwealth Government in progressing towards a Referendum on an Indigenous Voice to Parliament for the people of Australia to vote on.

### **About Us**

The First Peoples Disability Network Australia (FPDN) is a national organisation of and for Australia's First Peoples with disability, their families, and communities. Our organisation is governed by First Peoples with lived experience of disability. We are the custodians of the narratives of First Peoples with disability, their families, and communities, and we recognise this important responsibility.

First Peoples with disability and their families are amongst the most seriously disadvantaged and disempowered members of the Australian community. FPDN gives voice to their needs and concerns and shares their narratives of lived experience.

Our purpose is to promote recognition, respect, protection, and fulfilment of human rights, secure social justice, and empower First Peoples with disability to participate in Australian society on an equal basis with others. To do this, we proactively engage with communities around Australia and advocate for the interests of First Peoples with disability in Australia and internationally.

We follow the human rights framework established by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), to which Australia is a signatory, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

We work within a social model of disability, in which we understand 'disability' to be the result of barriers to our equal participation in the social and physical environment. These barriers can and must be dismantled. The social model stands in contrast to a medical model of disability, which focuses on diagnosis.

## **Constitution Alteration (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice) 2023**

**FPDN supports all elements of the Uluru Statement from the Heart including constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through the establishment of a Voice to Parliament.**

**FPDN supports the wording of Chapter IX and section 129 in the Constitution Alteration (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice) 2023 (the Bill), in its entirety, noting it is technically sound, and is consistent with the call for constitutional recognition in the Uluru Statement from the Heart.**

**FPDN recommends that The Bill should be passed by the Parliament, for consideration by the people at a referendum in 2023.**

## **The Need for a Voice: First Nations People with Disabilities**

Uncle Lester Bostock, one of our Founding elders first told of how First Nations people with disabilities experience double disadvantage, via racism and ablism, over twenty years ago. First nations people with disability are consistently disregarded and marginalised, with their needs often going unmet. In most areas of public discourse, from government policy to social media, journalism and advocacy, First Nations people are consistently relegated to the fringes. Mirroring the social reality, our people appear only as footnotes that address but one half of their reality at a time – either as a First Nations person or someone with disabilities.

As stated by the *Indigenous Voice Co-design Process Final Report to the Australian Government July 2021*, an Indigenous Voice will provide the right mechanism, working with and strengthening existing arrangements, for the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to be heard on issues that affect us. This is critical for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, but particularly for those within our communities with disabilities, their carers, families and communities who have been silenced for too long.

It is critical that the voices of First Nations people with disabilities have a permanent and authoritative platform from which to speak and assert their needs and rights. A Voice to Parliament and the Executive Government, that includes a permanent Disability Advisory Group or Committee<sup>1</sup>, is one step towards achieving this.

Once again, FPDN welcomes the opportunity to support the provisions of the *Constitution Alteration (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice) 2023 (Bill)*. Additionally, we would welcome the opportunity to appear at an upcoming Hearing with the Joint Select Committee.

Sincerely



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First Peoples Disability Network

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<sup>1</sup> The *Indigenous Voice Co-design Process Final Report to the Australian Government July 2021* included the Permanent Disability Advisory Group as a key structure in the Voice design.