##### **[00:00:02.760] - Bernard Namok Jnr**

Hi and welcome to Yarning Disability, the FPDN podcast. I'm your host, Bernard Namok Jr. I'm a proud St Paul, Badu, and Erubian man from the Torres Strait. I'm also the son of the designer of the Torres Strait Islander flag, Bernard Namok Senior, and an advocate for the first People's Disability Network. Join me now on Yarning Disability as we showcase First Nations people dealing with the disability, as well as their families and carers and other industry professionals.

##### **[00:00:44.790] - Carly Wallace**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are warned that the following podcast may contain the voices and names of people who are deceased. The First Peoples Disability Network and the producers of this podcast recognize the traditional custodians of the land on which this podcast is recorded. They pay respect to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders past, present and the future leaders of tomorrow. Fpdn would like to acknowledge our founding elders and their lasting legacy, Uncle Lester Bustock and Aunty Gail, Rankin, and acknowledge all first peoples living with a disability.

##### **[00:01:25.980] - News Grab**

As the countdown to the referendum draws closer, the is getting louder. The Prime Minister was in Sydney today pushing the yes vote. As hundreds rallied for the no side boat. Campaigns turning up the volume. Oh, yeah. We're voting no. Say yes. Using their Voice.

##### **[00:02:35.440] - Bernard Namok Jnr**

On Saturday, 14th of October 2023, Australians will be asked to vote on an indigenous voice to Parliament. The vote will determine whether the voice, a body providing advice to government on issues particularly impacting indigenous people, will be enshrined in the constitution. In this special voice episode of Yarning Disability, is the Minister for Indigenous Australians and proud Wiradjuri woman Linda Burney, and Damian Griffis, CEO of FPDN and proud descendant of the Worimi people of New South Wales. The Minister for Indigenous Australians, Linda Burney, sat at a national press club of Australia. She highlighted the need for the voice to happen now rather than later.

##### **[00:02:36.270] - Minister Linda Burney**

The question must surely be asked, how much longer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have to wait for recognition? When will we finally resolve this unfinished business? As Pat Anderson says, Let's finish the unfinished business between us all. If not now, when? We are so close. Our destination is on the horizon. We are just a few short months away from realizing the promise of the Uluru Statement, that historic first nations consensus on the way forward, where 250 indigenous leaders and elders gathered in the red dirt at Ulru to issue the Statement from the heart. The idea of constitutional recognition through a voice is what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have asked for themselves, have asked for, not the government. Later this year, Australians you will be asked a simple question. Do you support a change to the constitution to recognize the first peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait under voice? Yes or no? Canada recognized first nations people in the 1980s. In New Zealand, the Crown recognized the Māori people as far back as 1840. In 2023, it is time for Australia to recognize indigenous Australians. The first question I want to address today is why is the voice needed?

##### **[00:04:52.440] - Minister Linda Burney**

The simple answer is because the gap isn't closing fast enough. For far too long, governments have made policies for indigenous Australians, not with indigenous Australians. We need a voice to change that. We need the voice because we need to work in partnership with communities. We need a voice because we need to do better. And we particularly need to do better by young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. More than half of all indigenous Australians are under the age of 25. But our young peoples don't start on a level playing field. They need hope. They need hope. They need opportunities for parents and elders did not have. They need a voice. Consider this and please stand in these shoes.

##### **[00:06:04.880] - Speaker 4**

So what is FPDN doing around The Voice? They're a useful, easy to access information about The Voice, so you can have a better understanding. You can check out www. Haveyoursay. Net. Damian Griffis, CEO of FPDN, and a proud descendant of the Worimi people of New South Wales, explaining about The Voice and what impact it will have on first peoples living disability and their families?

##### **[00:06:09.180] - Damien Griffis**

So the voice referendum is about looking to change the Australian constitution to give voice to Aboriginal and Torres Islander people. So all Australians over the age of 18 will be asked whether they support, firstly, recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Islander people as the first Australians, which is just a fact. It can be controversial, that's just a fact, but also about supporting a formal voice to the Australian Parliament and also to the Australian cabinet, actually, that gives voice to Aboriginal and Torres Island people so that they can speak directly to the Australian Parliament or represent directly to the Australian Parliament, and also the Australian cabinet. So the cabinet, as we know, is made up of all the ministers and an opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Island people to be able to speak directly to them.

##### **[00:07:32.000] - Bernard Namok Jnr**

So come on the 14th of October, what are we expected to do?

##### **[00:07:38.280] - Damien Griffis**

Yeah. So the 14th of October is the day of the referendum. It's run the same as an election. So anyone who's on the electoral roll, any Australian over the age of 18 will be asked these simple questions and asked to vote yes or no. Do you support recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Island people as the first people in Australia? Do you support the idea of a voice to the Australian Parliament made up of Aboriginal and Torres Island people? And people will be asked to vote yes or no. It's our view at the first People's Disability Network that we would really want to see people vote yes. Because in the structure that has been discussed over the years in terms of what a voice could look like, we've been really saying, Well, there needs to be a voice of mob with disability within the voice structure.

##### **[00:08:39.470] - Damien Griffis**

So this is an opportunity to elevate or give voice to mob with disability as well. So we think that's really important.So do you have a fair idea on how the voting process will go, especially for mob with disability? Is it going to be accessible for them? And all the language will be used for first people with disability?

##### **[00:09:08.210] - Damien Griffis**

Yeah. So there's a few things that are happening. The Australian Electoral Commission runs the election. They'll be publishing a list of wheelchair accessible voting locations. But also you can do a postal vote, so you can do a vote before the 14th of October. There's also going to be options for people who are blind to vote over the telephone, which is something that's been going on for a while now, where people that if they have difficulty getting out of their home or if they have vision or I'm blind, then they can do phone voting. The other thing that's really important to note is that you can have someone with you in the voting booth. If you need someone to help you put your vote in, you're allowed to do that. So that can be anyone that you trust. So we need to get that message out to people. And there are going to be translations into a number of languages. I don't have a list in front of me at the moment, but we will put all that information onto our website to have your say website, which FPDN is running. So there are improvements happening in terms of access.

##### **[00:10:28.520] - Damien Griffis**

But if you have any difficulties, then please get in touch with us and we'll help you out to find out what you can do.

##### **[00:10:35.470] - Bernard Namok Jnr**

Yeah, I think it's important that everyone have their say. It is not far away when you look at it, like 14th of October. I know there's a lot of resources out there, but F. P. D.N And have created resources too, especially for the voice and for mobile disability.

##### **[00:10:56.650] - Damien Griffis**

Yeah, that's right, Bernard. We've got a website called haveyoursay. Com. Internet. We've also starting to do more and more interviews. Earlier this week, I did an interview with Inclusion Australia. So that's an organization representing Australians with intellectual disability. So we'll be sharing that on our website, too, because that provides a lot of good, just plain English information for everyone. I prefer everything in plain English myself the best times. We're also going to be doing an interview with Radio for the Blind next week, where we'll be talking about the voice there. We're going to be starting to do some community forums around the place to help mob with disability understand the referendum better. But also our website is going to be really important.

##### **[00:11:51.520] - Bernard Namok Jnr**

Yeah. And why should mob with disability have a say or votes in this referendum?

##### **[00:11:58.920] - Damien Griffis**

Because it's about the future of the country, we would say. And it's really important to know that the voice does potentially give more voice to mob with disability as well. Will it fix everything overnight? No. But what it can do is just give more opportunity to represent the voices of mob with disability in the parliamentary system. Parliamentary system is where we need to make our and have our voices heard. So it's really important that you get information about the referendum from places you can trust. So there's a lot of funny stuff going around, lots of dodgy information around.

##### **[00:12:42.850] - Bernard Namok Jnr**

Yeah, there's a lot of them on social media.

##### **[00:12:45.600] - Damien Griffis**

So I think it's always good to get the information from places you can trust. Our website is a good one. Listening to this podcast and talking with you trust is going to be really important to inform yourself so that you're making the decision you want to make.

##### **[00:13:05.420] - Bernard Namok Jnr**

Who started the idea in the first place for First Nations, people for having a voice and also be counted in the constitution? Well, it.

##### **[00:13:14.740] - Damien Griffis**

Actually goes back a really long way, Bernard. You could even go back as.

##### **[00:13:20.220] - Speaker 2**

Before the was written, even. There was representations that Aboriginal people and Aboriginal leaders made to different systems around the country, but it goes back a very long way. Even at the very first event that in 1901 that created the Commonwealth of Australia, which is not our system, and in here. There were Aboriginal people that turned up to that event to say, hey, where's our voice? Where's our representation? And then there's been many, there's been bark petitions. There's been different national bodies set up at different times, all about providing voices to Aboriginal and toxidry on the people. What's different this time is by putting the voice in the constitution, it makes it permanent. In the past, all these other attempts have been dependent on who's in government. We all remember Atzik, and it was created by the Parliament, but then it was also removed by the Parliament. So the constitutional part of it is it makes the voice more permanent. So whereas all the other attempts in the past have been damaged by governments of the day, and they've had the choice of listening or not listening. This is more about creating a more permanent way of giving voice to mob.

##### **[00:14:49.620] - Bernard Namok Jnr**

I think that answers my next question. If Australians do vote yes, and it comes back within the favor of the yes voters, how the voice will benefit the mob, especially with disability and their family as well?

##### **[00:15:08.570] - Damien Griffis**

Yeah, it's a great question, Bernard. I think it's what it really does is give voice to mob with disability. So we need to be able to speak up and talk about all the different things that are about improving the lives of our community members with disability. So we're expecting that if the vote is successful and the voice is established, that there will be strong representation of mob with disability within that structure. So we'll be looking to make sure that mob with disability are well represented, have power within that structure, and have a right to have their voices heard as much as anyone does. So that's what we're hoping for and planning for.

##### **[00:15:51.870] - Bernard Namok Jnr**

And what can't the voice do?

##### **[00:15:55.670] - Damien Griffis**

That's a really good question. It's an advisory body. So it provides advice to the parliamentary system. It doesn't run things. It doesn't provide services. It provides advice. But the Coalition of Aboriginal Peaks, under the closing the gap framework, is making big strides in the service side. So in a way, this is about adding to that, in a sense, giving us a voice in the parliamentary system. But the Coalition of Aboriginal Peaks will continue down the service path, if you like. It doesn't provide services. It's about providing expert advice from mob to the parliamentary system. We set up to the Parliament to accept that advice. But you would hope that the logic would be if the advice is coming from people, it should be well supported. But we still have coalition of Aboriginal and Peak stuff. So this is almost like covering another element. You've got the coalition of Aboriginal and Peak, the closing the gap side, doing the service side. This is about providing advice.

##### **[00:17:08.380] - Bernard Namok Jnr**

And like, mob can be reluctant to trust the governments. And why should we trust them now with this voice?

##### **[00:17:21.500] - Damien Griffis**

Great question. I think it's really important to go into this with our eyes wide open. This is dependent on the government and the parliamentary system does have the right not to take the advice. We do need to approach this with eyes wide open. Will it change the world? Will the world look different on the 15th of October? No. Will it necessarily change the lives of mob with disability overnight? No. But what it will do is give the opportunity for mob with disability to have a stronger voice and to be able to talk up into the structure, not our structure, but the structure that was brought on to say, hey, hear our voices. This is what needs to happen to be able to make positive change in lives of disability. So that's the positive thing. We're an organization that we are absolutely about treaty and absolutely about truth telling as well. It's not the end of the fight, it's the beginning. Well, it's a continuation of the fight, I should say. We still want to see a treaty and we still want to see truth telling and all those things as well. Yeah.

##### **[00:18:35.630] - Bernard Namok Jnr**

I think we won't know until we get all the votes in and look forward moving on from the yes or the no. But if Australia says yes in this referendum, what happens next with this vote? With the voice, yeah.

##### **[00:18:54.920] - Damien Griffis**

Yeah. Yeah. So then there would be plans to set up the voice structure. So the idea is that local and regional voices will elect Aboriginal and Torres Island people onto the voice. So that then will have to be a lot of work in making that happen. How do you go about doing those elections, for example? From our perspective, we'll be wanting to say, well, there was a commitment to establishing a standing committee on disability, is that there would be a group of First Nations, Aboriginal and on tourist island, the people with disability who would come together to provide advice to the bigger voice, so expecting plans to start happening about how that could work, how that structure could work. And that would need to happen, there'd be a lot of work in that, but that would need to happen straight away.

##### **[00:19:48.850] - Bernard Namok Jnr**

Yeah. And then what happens if Australians come back with the no votes? So what happens then?

##### **[00:19:56.300] - Damien Griffis**

Yeah, I think that'd be, or maybe if I share a personal view here, Bernard, I think it set the country back a long way. Referendums don't come around very often. And as you know from the Republican referendumum, that was way back in 1999, and what we're 25 years later in the snowy near being on the agenda again. So the risk would be that I think we would be concerned about how much power we would have. I'd also be really concerned about what that will mean as in terms of how everyone feels. It would feel like a massive rejection, I think, in some ways. I don't want to think about that too much just at the moment.

##### **[00:20:49.000] - Bernard Namok Jnr**

Yeah, no worries. Well, understandable, because everybody don't like rejections. I think with that more information and just that by reading a lot of have your say websites where there is a lot of information. I think people need to take time out and have a read. But is there anything else that you would like to say about the referendum?

##### **[00:21:15.520] - Damien Griffis**

Yeah, just like we said before, Bernard, just get the information from places you can trust. Like you just said, have a look at our website. And if you've got any questions, please ask us. And if you're not sure about something, please ask us. We're here to help. But our website does have some good information on it, and we'll keep updating it. Our podcasts and things are really important things to listen to, too. And Bernard Namok is a brilliant host on, always listening to him.

##### **[00:21:50.430] - Bernard Namok Jnr**

Yeah, no worries. Thanks for the feedback. And it's been going really good listening to stories of mob living with disability and also inspiring at the same time, listening to their stories and sometimes feel a bit flat on certain days. But when you have a listen to and have a yarn to mob sharing their stories, it's uplifting at the same time too.

##### **[00:22:14.670] - Damien Griffis**

So well said. Couldn't agree more about it. Yeah.

##### **[00:22:27.570] - Vox Pop**

My name is Jordan Wishart. I'm a Bridgerow man from Central Queensland, and I am voting yes. I believe, I hope, the voice is an opportunity for change within our communities.

##### **[00:22:45.810] - Vox Pop**

Hi, I'm Marley. I live on Yagara and Tarribal country, and I won't be voting in the referendum. I don't have faith in the process. Yeah, I don't have faith in the process, and I don't think that that's the best way to bring about real change for mob.

##### **[00:23:06.850] - Vox Pop**

Hi, my name's Kelly. I live on Go'ana Country, and I'll be voting yes in the referendum. I think having a voice to Parliament is long overdue and having one that's recognized in the constitution, so it can't be changed at the whim of the government is necessary. Hopefully, this is the first step towards treaty for First Nations' people.

##### **[00:23:28.870] - Vox Pop**

Hi, I'm Carly. I'm not sure what I'm voting in the referendum yet. I'm still getting answers from the yes side and the no side and what I feel as a sovereign Aboriginal person, I'm not sure I'll probably decide up until the day.

##### **[00:23:47.340] - Bernard Namok Jnr**

That was a special voice edition on yarning disability. If you'd like easily, accessible and easy to read information on the voice to inform your vote on the referendum, go to www. Liveyoursay. Net.

##### **[00:24:11.600] - Bernard Namok Jnr**

Thanks for listening to Yarning Disability, FPDN would like to thank you for coming on this journey, as each week we hear from first peoples living with a disability and shine a light on the issues they are facing. I'm your host, Bernard Namok Junior. Follow FPDN on our social media accounts to stay up to date with future episodes and information. You can also visit our website at www. Fpdn. Org. Au.