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April 2021

Indigenous Voice Co-Design Process
Submission to Stage Two

Via email: co-design@niaa.gov.au

The Centre for Policy Development (CPD) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to Stage Two of the Indigenous Voice Co-Design Process. We firmly believe that Australia's democracy can only thrive if it delivers for our first Australians and accepts the generous offer contained in the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* to walk together "in a movement of the Australian people for a better future".

CPD is an independent Australian policy institute. We develop long-term policies to lift the wellbeing of current and future generations. We seek to create, to connect, and convince on the policy challenges and opportunities that matter most for Australians over the long run. Our vision is a society that expands opportunity and social justice, an economy that is clean, innovative and productive, a government that is active and effective, and a country that is respected for its leadership and cooperation. We see a First Nations Voice to Parliament enshrined in the Constitution as a critical catalyst of this vision.

Over several years, CPD has conducted attitudes research into Australia's democracy. We have found what Australians want most from their democracy is to ensure that people are treated fairly and equally, especially the most vulnerable. Far from fearing change, Australians are hungry for democratic and political renewal. We understand successful democracies are stable but not static; they should change, and change for the better. We found that Australian communities want to see themselves in our decision-making bodies and have greater involvement in policy development.

In October 2020, CPD was honoured to host Professor Megan Davis, a key member of the Referendum Council and one of the architects of the deliberations and dialogues that led to the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*, to deliver the third John Menadue Oration. Professor Davis was the first Australian to deliver the Oration, following former Indonesian foreign minister, Marty Natalegawa, and acclaimed economist, Mariana Mazzucato. Professor Davis answered the question, "Can Australia deliver?", and highlighted the importance of constitutional reform (and a First Nations Voice) to Australian's future.

"It's important that constitutional reform insofar as our First Nations people is regarded as a discrete and serious issue of public policy. It's like climate change, it's like banking regulation, it's like superannuation, it's like domestic violence, it should be taken seriously. It's one of those really important public policy areas that define who we are as a nation, that defines who we are as Australians. The Uluru Statement from the Heart and its invitation to the people of Australia does set out a really serious public policy agenda and it will define us as a nation."

Professor Davis made clear that if we cannot embrace the Uluru Statement and its invitation to all Australians, then we risk defining our Constitution, our public institutions and our political culture as being incapable of change. As Professor Davis said, the outcome at Uluru is “a very Australian innovation”, the culmination of much work by Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians to develop reforms that will help Australia’s democracy to deliver on its core purpose for all. The deliberative process used is a textbook example of building consensus for change.

The challenges facing many Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander People are intergenerational. The establishment of a Voice that sits outside the electoral cycle is a long-term and practical solution to improve representation, to make sure the ideas and views of Indigenous Australians are heard in the development of policy and decision-making that impacts them.

As the Uluru Statement outlines, Australia’s Indigenous people are the most incarcerated people on the planet. CPD’s own research has found that our criminal justice systems create and compound disadvantage at escalating costs to children, families, and governments. We effectively have 10 criminal justice systems, one federal system and one system for each state and territory; these systems are all experienced differently by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, creating a de facto tenth system. In place of getting the support they need, ever more people are locked into cycles of disadvantage, at great cost to human dignity, and damaging not only prisoners but their families and communities. The impact has been devastating for Indigenous Australians, overrepresented at every stage of our criminal justice systems. They experience higher rates of victimisation and police contact. “This is the torment of our powerlessness”, says the Uluru Statement.

Reform is urgently needed to address the structural nature of this problem. A stronger relationship with Indigenous Australians and the addition of their voices in decision-making will ensure better outcomes for all and a stronger partnership between Indigenous Australians, governments of all persuasions, and the broader Australian community. We believe Australia should make the establishment of a First Nations Voice to Parliament the first step in our democratic renewal, one which is enshrined in our Constitution. In doing so we can signal our democratic maturity — our growing commitment to empowering all Australians, to enabling all children to flourish, and to innovation across our democracy to bolster equality and opportunity. Through this submission, CPD adds our voice to those across the Australian community who:

- **support the establishment of a First Nations Voice to Parliament enshrined in the Constitution**
- **call for a referendum on the Voice as soon as a model has been settled; and**
- **for the Voice to amplify the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who too often have been unheard in policy development and implementation.**



Travers McLeod
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