

Tony Abbott warns against rushing recognition for First Australians

- [THE AUSTRALIAN](#)
- MAY 18, 2015 12:35PM
- SARAH MARTIN

Tony Abbott has warned against rushing constitutional recognition for indigenous Australians, after a new survey found overwhelming support for change.

The Prime Minister said this morning he was determined to pursue acknowledgment of First Australians in the country's founding document, but his priority was refining the model to be taken to a vote.

"I am determined to get this done, but it is more important to get it right than to rush it," he said.

"If you look at the story of our country we have got an indigenous heritage, a British foundation, and a multicultural character, and if we can somehow acknowledge those realities in our Constitution that would be a very good thing; it would be completing our constitution not changing it," he said.

Mr Abbott has previously flagged a referendum for May 2017 to mark the 50th anniversary of the 1967 referendum on Aboriginal rights, a timeline supported by the parliamentary committee examining the next steps towards a successful vote.

His comments come after a new survey commissioned by the RECOGNISE campaign, released today, found 75 per cent of Australians would vote in support of recognition, with the change also supported by two-thirds of conservative voters.

Opposition leader Bill Shorten said he had "offered the hand of friendship" to Mr Abbott on indigenous recognition, but was still waiting for the Prime Minister to confirm a meeting between the two leaders and indigenous representatives.

"The best way forward is to get indigenous people in the same room with the Prime Minister and myself, let's talk through the next steps," he said.

"Australians are a generous people and recognise that we should be supporting indigenous Australians being recognised in our constitution."

He said securing a successful referendum was too important to be reduced to a “Labor versus Liberal” contest.