

Senior leaders call for indigenous advisory body

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Some of the country's most senior Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander figures have thrown their weight behind calls for political leaders to actively back a proposed indigenous parliamentary advisory body.

The recommendation, contained in the Referendum Council report delivered to Malcolm Turnbull and Bill Shorten and released last week, is the only current proposal for achieving indigenous constitutional recognition.

Referendum Council co-chair Mark Leibler warned political leaders at the report's release that "you either adopt our recommendation, or you put constitutional recognition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders on the backburner for the moment, and put it off for maybe the next 20 years".

The Council's report came after a series of 13 regional indigenous dialogues determined that previous proposals — including deleting and amending references to race in the constitution — would be unacceptable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders because of their purely symbolic nature.

The latest joint statement, from indigenous leaders as well as supporters for constitutional reform, calls on "the leadership of this country to support the Referendum Council's first recommendation to have a voice to Parliament, to have a body that enables us to determine our affairs".

"The aim of such a body should be to represent and give voice to the First Nations of Australia in their contemporary form. It should represent, as Dr Galarrwuy Yunupingu has appropriately described, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in a modern world."

The statement emerged from a meeting called by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner June Oscar and Reconciliation Australia co-chair Tom Calma.

It follows concerns that politicians, including several of the major parties' indigenous MPs, have been actively resisting the Council's recommendations, preferring instead to return to the previous proposals.

“These (Referendum Council) aspirations were expressed in extensive national consultations leading up to the First Nation's Convention at Uluru on constitutional reform,” the statement says.

“The call for a voice from Uluru and the Referendum Council Recommendation is not a new idea.

“Let us sit around the one camp fire. As the Yolgnu said at Uluru — we have an obligation to keep the fire burning.”

The statement comes a day after an open letter to the Prime Minister and the Opposition Leader from a youth delegation elected at the recent Uluru constitutional convention, urging politicians “not to undermine the Referendum Council report, or propose your own preferred alternatives, but to consider it seriously, and to move forward with its recommendations for the betterment of the nation”.

The full list of signatories is:

June Oscar AO

Professor Tom Calma AO

Pat Anderson AO

Professor Megan Davis

Thomas Mayor

Josephine Crawshaw

Suzanne Thompson

Jackie Huggins AM

Gary Oliver

Roy Ah-See

Sol Belliar

James Christensen

Mark Yettica Paulson

Karen Mundine

David Allinson

Andrea Mason

Noel Pearson

Shireen Morris

Sean Gordon

Geoff Scott