

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice

Frequently Asked Questions

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About Voice

What is the Voice?

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice is a request made as part of the Uluru Statement from the Heart. If the referendum is successful, the Voice will be an independent body to represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People to the Federal Parliament (who make laws), and the Executive (the Ministers and public service who carry the laws out).

The Voice will provide advice on laws and help to develop policies that effect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Principles about what the Voice would look like at <https://voice.gov.au/about-voice/voice-principles>

What is the Uluru Statement from the Heart?

The Uluru Statement from the Heart was a First Nations led initiative of dialogues across the country, culminating in an invitation. It called for change to both the law and policies to reform the relationship between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the non-indigenous population. It is a roadmap for social justice for First Nations People through a:

- Constitutionally enshrined Voice,
- Agreement making (or Treaty), and
- Truth telling about our history.

For more information and to read the Statement you can go to <https://ulurustatement.org>

Why is Voice happening before Treaty?

Building a meaningful and lasting treaty will be a lengthy and complex undertaking. There are over 250 different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nations in Australia! Work is happening to start getting a Treaty, but there is still much more to do. (For example, the Government has appointed an Ambassador to the First Nations Peoples - <https://www.dfat.gov.au/about-us/our-people/homs/ambassador-first-nations-people>)

A Voice is something we can implement right now and will help lay the foundation for ensuring that a Treaty is fair and effective. Having a Voice does not close the door to having a Treaty (but it does not guarantee one either).

Why is a Voice needed?

Although successive Australian governments have committed to addressing the injustice experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, progress is slow (or non-existent). You can see the government's report on 'Closing the gap' at . Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are overrepresented in every service The Salvation Army operates.

A Voice will create a mechanism for those on the ground to give insight and advice on how laws and policies can better address the issues that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people face in a way that will be effective. There is no one size that fits all, so Voice gives us a way to tailor advice and action to what is needed.

Will the Voice divide Australians?

An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice is a mechanism to allow our government to listen to how policies and laws are impacting our First Nations people. We do not believe that listening to people will lead to division.

The Salvation Army's 140-year experience in providing critical support and services to Australians most in need, we know that engaging in open, respectful, and constructive conversation is the first step to making impactful change. It is these intentional and structured discussions that will reduce the risk of division.

Is Voice legally risky?

There is legal risk associated with any Constitution change, but most legal experts argue that the current proposition is very low risk. (For a more thorough explanation see <https://theconversation.com/no-the-voice-proposal-will-not-be-legally-risky-this-misunderstands-how-constitutions-work-212696>)

The question being asked of us is very straightforward. It involves recognising First Nations people by creating the Voice. It then gives the Voice the power to make representations (which just means give advice) to the Parliament and the Executive. The change then gives Parliament power to make laws relating to the Voice. This means that all the safeguards that are already in place around how laws are made will continue to be in place for laws made about the Voice.

Will the Voice be more or less costly than current initiatives?

The budget for Voice will be decided by the government but we would expect that the Voice will save Australia money over the long run. This is because programs co-designed with the people affected tend to get better outcomes more efficiently because funding goes directly to activities that make a difference.

We also know that early intervention tends to save government money because it is generally more expensive to address the outcomes of disadvantage and hardship than to prevent it in the first place (like how it tends to be cheaper to help a person stay in their home rather than provide homelessness supports). By getting timely advice from the people who can find local solutions, our hope is that the Voice will help governments achieve better outcomes at less expense.

Where can I learn more?

Some great resources can be found at:

- [The Voice](#)
- [Australian Electoral Commission \(aec.gov.au\)](http://aec.gov.au)
- [Home - Uluru Statement from the Heart](#)
- [Yes23](#)

About The Salvation Army's position

Why is The Salvation Army supporting a Voice?

The Salvation Army has accepted the gracious invitation contained in the Uluru Statement from the Heart, and we want to be part of delivering on the promise contained within it. A constitutionally protected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice is an important first step toward social justice.

As a Christian movement, committed to social justice, we believe a Voice will respect, value, and facilitate reconciliation, truth telling and improved social policy making with, not for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. A Voice will provide an opportunity to correct existing structural issues and ensure that future legislation does not create or perpetuate disadvantage and injustice.

Why is The Salvation Army taking a position at all?

The Salvation Army is non-partisan. This means that we do not endorse any one political party. Sometimes taking a stand on social justice issues can be uncomfortable and it always involves standing up to the systems, structures, and cultural practices that harm people. That can involve getting involved in things that are 'political' because there is a moral and social justice imperative.

Being nonpartisan does not stop The Salvation Army advising and advocating on social policy that affects hardship and injustice in Australia. Our Mission, Vision and faith in Christ compel us to advocate for better systems and structures.

The Uluru Statement is not a partisan document and governments of all political persuasions at the State and Territory level have endorsed the idea of a Voice. The Salvation Army's support for the Voice is not partisan in any way.

I agree with The Salvation Army's position – how can I help?

It is important to remember that respecting different viewpoints and engaging in respectful and informed dialogues are a big part of this conversation. Here are some ways you can help:

- **Participate in a yarn** – join one of the many community yarns happening about Voice to listen and learn from lived experiences.
- **Share information**- only share information from reputable sources such as official government websites to avoid spreading misinformation and disinformation.
- **Spread the word** – share what you have learnt and have respectful conversations with family and friends as we all gear up toward a history making vote on 14 October.

You can find more resources to help at <https://my.salvos.org.au/voice/>

I disagree with The Salvation Army's position – what does that mean for me?

It is okay to disagree with the position The Salvation Army has chosen to take, and no one should ever tell you have to vote a particular way. The question of Voice is complex with many factors to take into consideration. The key focus of The Salvation Army's communications in this area is to make sure that everyone has access to the information they need to make an informed decision – not to force anyone to think or feel a particular way.

Everyone who works, volunteers, or engages with The Salvation Army is welcome to have differing opinions. It is, however, important that those views are expressed in a respectful way that is mindful of the trauma and pain many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will be feeling at this time.

It is also critical that, while working in an official capacity, you represent The Salvation Army as being in support of a Voice.

How can I learn more about The Salvation Army's position?

You can visit <https://www.salvationarmy.org.au/about-us/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-voice/> to learn more, or you can come along to a Yarn! Register at <https://my.salvos.org.au/voice/voice-yarning-circles/>.

About referenda and laws

What is a referendum and why do we need it?

A referendum is the only way to change the Constitution in Australia. It involves every registered voter in Australia casting a vote of either Yes or No on a specific question to amend the Constitution. To pass there needs to be what is called a double majority. That means a majority of people who vote in Australia need to vote yes and also a majority of people in a majority of states (four or more states) need to vote yes. You can learn more about referenda at <https://aec.gov.au/referendums/>.

How will parliament make laws about the Voice (if a Voice is created)?

Parliament will make laws about Voice in the same way they make laws about many issues. The process involves several 'checks and balances' to make sure that the draft legislation is in line with the Constitution, consistent with other laws, does not infringe human rights or great unnecessary red tape and is subject to public scrutiny. You can find out about how laws are made in Australia by visiting

https://www.aph.gov.au/about_parliament/house_of_representatives/powers_practice_and_procedure/00_-_infosheets/infosheet_7_-_making_laws

Why can't Voice be legislated instead of in the Constitution?

The Uluru Statement calls for a constitutionally enshrined Voice for several reasons. Enshrining a Voice in the Constitution acknowledges First Nations people in our primary law as well as establishing the Voice as independent of government. Experience has shown that legislated advisory bodies are more vulnerable to being disbanded or sidelined because they do not have the protection that the Constitution provides.

The most important reason for pushing for a change to the Constitution though, is that this is the request that has come from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people themselves. We cannot start the process of listening by ignoring what was actually asked for.

Will a Voice cede Aboriginal sovereignty?

Aboriginal sovereignty is a complex idea and people use the one phrase to encompass different concepts. The short answer though, is no. Whichever sense of sovereignty is being considered, the Voice will not change the situation of sovereignty as it stands now. You can read what legal

academics have to say on sovereignty at <https://www.unsw.edu.au/news/2023/06/ten-questions-about-the-voice-to-parliament---answered-by-the-ex>

Where can I go to learn more?

If you want to find out more about the Voice, we recommend:

- <https://www.anu.edu.au/about/strategic-planning/indigenous-voice-to-parliament>
- <https://voice.gov.au/>
- <https://www.aec.gov.au/referendums/>
- <https://www.sydney.edu.au/nccc/the-voice-to-parliament.html>
- <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-social-justice/voice-referendum-understanding>

It is important to avoid misleading arguments. Try to find information from news sources you recognise, as well as that from government webpages (ending in [.gov.au](https://www.gov.au/)) and educational sources (web pages ending [.edu.au](https://www.edu.au/)).

Other sources may have accurate information, but they may not.

Always consider what the person is saying, who is saying it, and if there might be another reason to be telling you this. They may have left out details or are treating their opinion as fact. They could be using techniques or making your emotions influence your interpretation of what they are saying.

If so, return to a trusted source, and see if they have said something similar, or if they have debunked it.

About Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage

What causes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage?

Many systems which help non-indigenous people are not suited to helping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage. This is what people mean when they say aboriginal disadvantage is 'systemic'.

The systems and structures we have currently are not as good as they could be for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders experiencing poverty, homelessness, unemployment, or poor health.

We need to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to ensure these systems meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and find solutions that work for all Australians.

Why don't all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people agree with Voice?

It is important to remember that First Nations People, just like any other community, may not share a single point of view. Through the thousands of consultations conducted throughout the country, we know that a vast majority of First Nations People support a Voice. Surveys and polls have consistently shown that over 80% of First Nations People are in support of Voice. That means for every one First Nations person you meet who disagrees, there are four others who agree.

How can I support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people during this conversation?

It is important to be mindful that this may be a particularly challenging time for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Understand that this may be very personal to them.

Here are some ways you can be supportive during this conversation:

- **Listen**- if they are open to having a conversation on Voice, actively listen to them. Do not push them to disclose more than they are comfortable with.
- **Be Respectful**- respect that their journey and history are unique.
- **Be Considerate**- do not share insensitive, racist, hurtful, or discriminatory contents on social media. Such content can cause serious emotional and psychological harm.

Where can I go for support?

We understand that this may be a challenging time for many people. Remember that you are not alone. There are several services, including your local Salvos, ready to provide confidential and compassionate help today.

- <https://www.salvationarmy.org.au/about-us/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-voice/we-are-here-to-help/>
- [Employee Assistance Programme for Support & Help](#)