

## VOICE TO PARLIAMENT

### *Statement*

**HON KLARA ANDRIC (South Metropolitan)** [5.38 pm]: I rise today to join my parliamentary colleagues Hon Dan Caddy and Hon Lorna Harper in putting my position on the upcoming referendum this Saturday. I first and foremost thank my dear parliamentary colleague Hon Rosie Sahanna for moving her motion this morning. I know that many of us wanted to speak, so I am taking the opportunity this evening to put my position on the record. As I said in my inaugural speech, and I will say it again today, it is with great honour that I stand alongside Hon Rosie Sahanna in this house.

I want to point out to members this evening that we are standing on the eve of Australian history being made as we approach referendum day this Saturday. I truly believe that the question being put to the Australian people is a simple ask. It is a humble ask. One of the issues that I have grappled with the most, I would say, along the course of this campaign is the No side saying “If you don’t know, vote no”. I find this to be an insult to our constituents’ capability to make an informed decision when voting at referendum. I repeat to members that the motto “If you don’t know, vote no” is, quite frankly, insulting. We all know that progress must be made. Hon Rosie Sahanna talked about 65 000 years and the oldest living culture in the world and she asked us if we have thought about the future of this country and I want to say that yes, I have, honourable member. I want to see better outcomes in areas such as health, employment, life expectancy and across the sector for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I want to see lower incarceration rates and I certainly want to see lower suicide rates. That is exactly why I will be voting yes at the upcoming referendum. Progress must be made together and enshrining the Voice into the Constitution means simply achieving better outcomes.

It is just an advisory body that will advise government. It is really quite simple. It is a simple request. Regardless of what the other side and the No campaigners have tried to make it into with the fearmongering, it simply is not that. The Hon Dr Steve Thomas talked about the history. I think the reason that Hon Kyle McGinn talked about history in depth is to say that all sides across all sides and across a long time, we have it wrong. We have put in advisory bodies, we have taken them away and we have seen that, which is why enshrining it into the Constitution is so important. We have seen the failures. We are saying let us stop those failures. Let us make some real progress on these important issues for our First Nations people. However, progress requires consistency and we have not had that in the past. Misinformation painting doom and gloom, for me, is really disappointing because the Voice is not about division. In fact, honourable members, it is about unity. It is about enshrining an advisory body to achieve better outcomes.

The Voice will also remove the politics that we have seen in the past of achieving better outcomes. It will enable us to continue to make steps forward in the right direction. Members and President, our credibility on where we stand on Indigenous issues is being showcased on an international scale. I remind members of this house and the Western Australian community just how important this is. It will be a reflection of where we truly stand on these issues come referendum day. With this in mind, I would like to ask all members to consider that the majority, which is 80 per cent, of Indigenous Australians are calling for a Voice. I have certainly done my share of talking to members of my multicultural community to advise them of exactly what this is. Some have been more difficult than others, but some have been quite easy when I explained what the Voice is trying to achieve. As I said, I know that we are on the eve of this referendum, but I encourage everyone on the right side of history—as I like to call it—to continue to speak to those people who are still unsure about how they will vote.

We have talked about some of the areas in which we want to achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal people, so I will not go into those. We have certainly talked about the history, which Hon Dan Caddy went into detail on earlier. It is time to establish an advisory body free from interference. We need to do better; in fact, we must do better. The Voice is essentially about recognition, unity, consistency and better outcomes, and it is about time.

### *Statement*

**HON DR SALLY TALBOT (South West)** [5.45 pm]: We have had several debates and discussions about the Voice in this place over the last 12 months, but this is the first opportunity that I have had to put my views on the record. I will take the chance to do so and indicate my wholehearted and unreserved support for the proposition that we are being asked to vote on over the weekend. I do that because it is, in fact, a very straightforward question. It has been well canvassed in this place, not least by my colleague Hon Rosie Sahanna. I thanked her for moving the motion today that has enabled many of us to put our views on the record this close to the referendum.

What really impressed me about the way that Hon Rosie Sahanna addressed this issue was that she showed how through using our imaginations in a constructive and loving way, we might be able to envisage a better future for people who have been very badly disadvantaged by the way that they have been treated over the last 200-plus years. Hon Rosie Sahanna did not put on her rose-coloured glasses. I have rarely met a person more pragmatic and grounded

than Hon Rosie Sahanna. She showed us how through using some of our instincts about caring for people, equity and equality, we might be able to create a better future for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.

As I said, the question on Saturday is straightforward. When members walk into the polling place, they will see the following words —

“A Proposed Law: to alter the Constitution to recognise the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice.

Do you approve this proposed alteration?”

The answer, in my view, is clearly yes. I wonder whether the people who have called for more detail actually know what the Australian Constitution looks like. In fact, Madam President, I know you know that there are some editions that are not much bigger than this mobile phone. It does indeed fit in the back pocket of a person with my build when I am wearing trousers or jeans. That is how big the Constitution is. We are being asked to insert a new section into the Constitution; it is a one sentence. That is exactly how it should be and I would defy anybody to come up with a better way to establish the recognition of Indigenous people. Robert French, the esteemed jurist, recently stated “The Voice is a big idea but not a complicated one.” I think there has been a complete failure of imagination on the part of the opponents of the Voice to be unable to see that this simple proposition could create such a significant change if it was supported.

The other day, I went to a meeting down in Denmark at the surf club. We had picture windows out onto the Southern Ocean. Many members know how beautiful it is because they actually pay a lot of money to come to my town on holiday. We had a meeting there that was very well attended. We had some very prestigious speakers, including Aunty Carol Pettersen, who is one of our local elders. She is a Menang-Ngadju elder. Aunty Carol took us very gently and quietly and calmly through the reasons why we needed to make this change. She reminded us that Aboriginal people have not been treated as equals in Australia. She said: they took our land. They took our children. They took our language. They took our culture. They took our beliefs. We were supposed to die out. We were not counted. We were dehumanised by special laws and a punitive system that masqueraded under the heading “native welfare”.

For those members who know their Australian history, particularly on this topic, those words reminded me of the words that Paul Keating, the former Prime Minister, used in December 1992 at Redfern. He said —

... the starting point might be to recognise that the problem starts with us non-Aboriginal Australians.

It begins ... with that act of recognition.

That is what we are being asked to do on Saturday—to recognise and respect. Keating said —

It begins ... with that act of recognition.

Recognition that it was we who did the dispossessing.

We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life.

We brought the diseases. The alcohol.

We committed the murders.

We took the children from their mothers.

We practised discrimination and exclusion.

It was our ignorance and our prejudice.

And our failure to imagine these things being done to us.

With some noble exceptions, we failed to make the most basic human response and enter into their hearts and minds.

We failed to ask—how would I feel if this were done to me?

As a consequence, we failed to see that what we were doing degraded all of us.

Those words are just as real today in 2023 as they were in 1992. I think they ring very true in the debate that we have been having for the last 12 months. That brings us to right here and now, and where to from here? We have received an invitation from Aboriginal people. That invitation has been couched in very gracious and gentle terms. That invitation is to establish a voice to the Australian Parliament. The Uluru Statement from the Heart makes it very clear that these are the voices of Aboriginal people talking to us non-Aboriginal Australians. Part of the Uluru Statement that I think illustrates this says —

With substantive constitutional change and structural reform, we believe this ancient sovereignty can shine through as a fuller expression of Australia's nationhood.

...

We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a *rightful place* in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country

We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution.

I want to say a couple of things to Hon Rosie Sahanna and Divina D'Anna, the member for Kimberley. I want to say sorry for the pain that sharing their country has brought to them and their people. I also want to say thank you. I want to thank them for their patience in bearing with us while we took this long, torturous road that has taken us to get here. I also want to say that whatever happens on Saturday, we will stand shoulder to shoulder with them until we get the equality that they deserve.

*Statement*

**HON DR STEVE THOMAS (South West — Leader of the Opposition)** [5.53 pm]: I will try to take three minutes and leave Hon Dr Brad Pettitt four minutes. Let us try to do this sensibly. I will make a couple of quick comments on the comments that have been made tonight. Hon Dan Caddy is right; there is a long history here. Hon Kyle McGinn raised the day. I note that I have been abused twice for talking about the history of this thing, and I think I take my life in my hands when I do, but maybe there is a difference depending on which side of politics one sits. He was right. From Howard to Abbott to Turnbull, federally there was an agreement about Aboriginal recognition in the Constitution. It was not an agreement to the Voice; it was for Aboriginal recognition, and there is a difference. Perhaps if Hon Anthony Albanese had continued along that line of recognition, we would have a completely different outcome at the moment. What changed? The member is right. In 2022, Anthony Albanese won the election and said he was going to commit to the entire Uluru Statement from the Heart in full. That was not what Howard, Abbott and Turnbull agreed to. It was Anthony Albanese who change the agreement over time.

**Hon Dan Caddy:** Will you take an interjection, member?

**Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS:** Make it quick, because I do not have much time.

**Hon Dan Caddy:** The Uluru Statement included the Voice and that was before Albanese's time.

**Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS:** Yes, but Albanese committed to the Statement. The Liberal leadership over time—Howard, Abbott all the way through to Turnbull—agreed to constitutional recognition. Hon Lorna Harper has been called racist; so have I. I agree that there is abuse on all sides. I was abused today in this house.

Several members interjected.

**Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS:** Apparently if you interject and you are male and white, that is not okay. I hope the President applies the same rules to Hon Dan Caddy, Hon Kyle McGinn and Hon Darren West because it is a double standard I do not like all that much.

I think Hon Dan Caddy said that the Liberal Party opposed it because it was a Labor position. That is not true. The Liberal Party opposes the Voice —

**Hon Dan Caddy:** Noel Pearson said that; I was quoting him.

**Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS:** Sorry, Noel Pearson said that. To be honest, in my view Noel Pearson is not a law expert. He may be a long-term advocate and I do not want to disrespect him but he is not an expert in law. He takes his position. To disrespect those Aboriginal people and take the alternative perspective would be equally offensive though. For everybody who disrespects Jacinta Price, Warren Mundine or anybody who has been on the other side —

**Hon Lorna Harper:** Time!

**Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS:** Goodness; all right. This is the first time I have ever said this, President: if you do not know, vote no. I have never said that out loud. I have never said it in a campaign but obviously, if it did not work, it did not work. If people did not know how it worked, the slogan would not work. Obviously, it is not an insult to the Australian people.

**Hon Klara Andric** interjected.

**Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS:** If people are offended by it and they think it is offensive, it is because —

**Hon Klara Andric** interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS:** — people do not know. In that case, it is just wrong. I was going to talk about tax issues tonight but I am going to give the rest of the time available to Hon Dr Brad Pettitt. A very good piece of news he will be waiting for can be discussed next sitting week.