

FACT SHEET

CONSTITUTIONAL RECOGNITION OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AUSTRALIANS

WHY SHOULD AUSTRALIANS SUPPORT CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE?

Constitutional recognition already has wide support and is seen by many to be an important further step that should now be taken towards full recognition of the special place of Indigenous Australians in the life of modern Australia. There are several reasons for this.

First, many people would be surprised to know that not all citizens are treated equally under the Australian Constitution. While racial discrimination is no longer accepted in our community, in our workplaces or in our daily lives, the Constitution permits laws that discriminate on the basis of race.

While over 90 per cent of voters in the 1967 Referendum approved positive changes to the Constitution in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, a number of questions about the way our Constitution treats Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples remain unresolved.

Second, while the majority of Australians value and celebrate the unique contribution Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and culture has made to our national identity, the Constitution, Australia's founding document, gives no acknowledgement of the place of Indigenous Australians in our nation's history or our contemporary society.

Also, many people believe that constitutional recognition would serve as a powerful symbol of the nation's desire to embrace Indigenous Australians as a full and equal part of the Australian nation.

WHY WILL CONSTITUTIONAL RECOGNITION SUCCEED WHEN AUSTRALIANS HISTORICALLY AUSTRALIANS HAVE NOT SUPPORTED CHANGE?

The Panel does not under-estimate the challenge of achieving nation-wide consensus on the referendum. Only eight out of 44 referendums since Federation have been successful.

This record means we need to make sure we build the most robust and persuasive case for change.

The Panel recognises that there are diverse views in the community about constitutional change and welcomes the opportunities to hear these views from around Australia.

Gaining support for constitutional change will be no easy task but the Panel believes this is an issue which can unite all Australians.