

## FACT SHEET

### CONSTITUTIONAL RECOGNITION OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AUSTRALIANS

#### WHAT BENEFITS WILL CONSTITUTIONAL RECOGNITION HAVE FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AUSTRALIANS?

Constitutional recognition has the potential to benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in many ways.

Constitutional recognition would help create mutual trust and respect leading to stronger relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and other Australians.

It would be a big step towards reconciliation, demonstrating the commitment of non- Indigenous Australians to acknowledge the place and contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in our nation's history and contemporary society.

Constitutional recognition could contribute to raising the self esteem of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as well as improving their social and emotional wellbeing.

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists recently published a report noting that mental health benefits would result from constitutional recognition.

An improved level of wellbeing and sense of belonging may influence a young Aboriginal person to make positive life choices.

Constitutional recognition could also remove racially discriminatory provisions in the Constitution and enhance the legal protection provided by the Constitution for all Australians.

#### DIDN'T WE RECOGNISE ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AUSTRALIANS IN THE 1967 REFERENDUM?

The 1967 referendum removed wording in the Constitution that was discriminatory specifically to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on the basis of their race.

In the 1967 referendum, voters were asked if two references in the Constitution that discriminated against Aboriginal people should be removed. Voters supported this with 90.8 per cent of Australian voters recording 'yes', the largest 'yes' vote in an Australian referendum.

The outcomes of this successful vote meant that the Commonwealth could finally make laws for Aboriginal people and Aboriginal people could be counted in the national census.

However there was nothing in the 1967 referendum that recognised the special place of Australia's first peoples in the Constitution or that prohibited racially discriminatory laws. That's why, in 2011, constitutional recognition is seen as unfinished business.