



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Bishops issue statement on Indigenous Voice to Parliament

MEDIA RELEASE

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As a vote on an Indigenous Voice to Parliament nears, Australia's bishops have encouraged Catholics to read and discuss the Uluru Statement from the Heart – the document from which the Voice proposal emerged.

During their plenary meeting in Sydney this week, the bishops considered how they might assist Catholics in preparing for the referendum to enshrine the Voice to Parliament in the Constitution, with a vote due in the second half of 2023.

While the bishops – based on a decision they took in May 2022 – will later this year issue their annual Social Justice Statement on the place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Australian society, they decided to issue a statement at this point in the referendum process.

The bishops argued that the fact First Nations Peoples have lived in Australia for many thousands of years but their custodianship of the land isn't mentioned in the Constitution is "an omission which needs to be rectified".

A Voice to Parliament isn't the only way to achieve that outcome, the bishops wrote, but it "is the way requested by those who gathered at the historic meeting at Uluru".

"This could be a significant step towards a more just and equitable Australia," the statement says.

"We want to encourage all Australians to educate themselves as well as possible concerning the proposal to establish the Voice.

"This is an important moment in the history of the nation, and it can help us to move towards a deep and just reconciliation. It also offers a mechanism to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples."

The bishops call for a meaningful debate on the issue, acknowledging that "people may, in good faith, have differing concerns and perspectives".

"We are an open democracy, and this is a moment to use our democratic institutions to produce a high-quality debate shaped by a genuine concern to do justice and bring healing to First Nations Peoples," they wrote.

"We ask those drafting the changes to the Constitution to work together in a spirit of cooperation, so that the proposal presented to the Australian people will appeal to a wide range of the population."

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference endorsed the Uluru Statement from the Heart in 2021, with the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia taking the same step last year.

The bishops encouraged Catholic parishes, schools and agencies to arrange opportunities for people to read the document and have discussions about their response to its key messages.

Read the full statement at: <https://bit.ly/BishopsVoice>

Access the Uluru Statement at: <https://ulurustatement.org/the-statement/view-the-statement/>