

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice

“In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard. We leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country. We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.” – Uluru Statement from the Heart.

The *Uluru Statement from the Heart* invited all Australians to walk together towards justice. Caritas Australia wholeheartedly accepted this invitation, and walks in union and solidarity with our First Australian¹ partners and communities across our land. We fully support the call for Voice, Treaty and Truth.

Guided by the Gospel, we seek justice, dignity and hope for humanity and all of God’s creation. With compassion in our hearts, Caritas Australia embraces and supports the creation of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution.

Standing with First Australian communities as one human family

For almost 60 years, Caritas Australia, in partnership with First Australian communities, has worked towards a just world for all.

As an organisation, we decry the unacceptable gap between First Australians and non-Indigenous Australians, and acknowledge that these inequalities are the consequence of Australia’s colonial history, systemic discrimination and injustice, and the failure to place First Australians at the centre of decision-making.

Caritas Australia’s work finds its expression in Catholic Social Teaching. Subsidiarity, as well as solidarity and participation, are principles that underpin our mission and our support for the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*, including the proposed Voice.

For First Australian communities to flourish, we must be guided by the principle of subsidiarity and ensure that all people have the right to participate in the decisions that impact their lives and those of future generations.

¹ Caritas Australia uses the term ‘First Australians’ in our material after consultation with our partners. References in this statement also use other terms used by the government and other organisations where they use a different term.

In 2016, a group of 11 First Australian and Catholic organisations set out to define what subsidiarity means in the *Statement on Subsidiarity*². The group shared a simple message — that First Australians have the solutions, and it is time for everyone else to listen.

We echo this call and strongly believe that decisions must be made with, rather than for, First Australians.

Everyone belongs to one human family, regardless of their national, religious, political, and ideological differences. This is most powerfully expressed in the Gospel story of the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-12). It is a story in which every voice is heard and understood.

For too long, the voice of indigenous people has not had its rightful place. The proposal for a First Nations Voice will make history by recognising the original custodians of the land.

Caritas Australia supports a Voice enshrined in the Constitution

Caritas Australia is committed to working towards a more just society where all can thrive, closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. We recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of Australia and respect their cultures, lands, waters, histories, and right to live in a society free of economic, social, and cultural oppression.

By enshrining a Voice in the Constitution, we as a community will take another step towards the full realisation of human dignity and unity for all Australians. It is only when the dignity and rights of all people are fully realised that a just and compassionate world will come into being.

² *Joint Statement on Subsidiarity* by Aboriginal Carbon Fund, Caritas Australia, Centacare Wilcannia-Forbes, Djilpin Arts Aboriginal Corporation, Jesuit Social Services, Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation, National Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council, Red Dust Healing, Redfern Jarjum College, Tjanpi Desert Weavers, Unity of First Peoples Australia, Western Desert Nganampa Walytja Palyantjaku Tjutaku Aboriginal Corporation
<https://www.caritas.org.au/media/boklbxxr/joint-statement-on-subsidiarity-booklet.pdf>