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## **A First Nations Voice to Parliament is a path to healing and reconciliation**

Authentic and meaningful recognition of First Nations people in the Australian Constitution is a critical step along Australia's path towards reconciliation. Through the Uluru Statement from the Heart, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are seeking that recognition through a Voice to Parliament that will provide a practical way to represent their views and interests.

We have seen in recent months great debate over the question that will be posed to Australians, and the constitutional and legislative considerations of a First Nations Voice to Parliament including what powers should be exercised. While acknowledging the ongoing need for respectful and meaningful debate on this issue, the Catholic Bishops have recognised that the omission of First Nation's custodianship of the land in the Constitution "needs to be rectified" and a Voice to Parliament is "the way requested by those who gathered at the historic meeting at Uluru".

As Catholic schools we understand the need for a "voice" to parliament to ensure our views can be represented and considered in the broader policy-making for our school communities, so they can continue to be authentically Catholic in their nature, culture and teachings. A current example is the proposed reforms to anti-discrimination laws by the Australian Law Reform Commission which would severely limit our ability to operate and teach as Catholic schools.

As the traditional custodians of Australia, the Voice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, needs to be heard in a way that will authentically improve the future for First Nations people.

As the Bishops have said, "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."

I encourage our Catholic schools and others to take up this opportunity to learn more about the Voice and to engage with their local First Nations families and communities on this important direction for Australia.

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