



# JOINT PRESS RELEASE

**THE HON. TONY ABBOTT MP, PRIME MINISTER  
THE HON. BILL SHORTEN MP, LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION**

## **INDIGENOUS RECOGNITION**

Our country has moved closer to recognising the First Australians in our constitution and ending the great silence about indigenous people in our founding document.

There will be more steps in this journey but for the first time in our country's history, the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition have sat down with Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders to consider the path ahead.

The Leader of the Opposition and I restated our commitment to recognising indigenous people in the constitution and we listened to indigenous leaders' views and advice.

Without bipartisan support, no referendum is likely to succeed.

We heard the need for a national discussion involving all Australians; because this should be a unifying moment owned by everyone.

Most of all, we heard that it's important to get this right.

The Leader of the Opposition and I are committed to holding a recognition referendum.

Based on today's discussions, we consider that the referendum could not be held before the next term of Parliament and should be outside the politics of the election cycle.

We agree the referendum should be held when there is the best possible chance of success.

Before then, there should be a more intense and structured broad-based national conversation on what indigenous recognition can achieve and on the precise form that it could take.

To drive these efforts, there now needs to be a national conversation involving all Australians.

With the support of the Opposition, we propose three new steps:

Firstly, we will establish a series of community conferences across the country to provide an opportunity for everyone to have a say and for all significant points of view to be considered. Prior to the commencement of these community conferences, all members of parliament will have an opportunity to discuss indigenous recognition.

Secondly, the Parliamentary Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples chaired by Mr Ken Wyatt AM MP with Deputy Chair, Senator Nova Peris OAM will develop a discussion paper on various issues regarding constitutional change to help facilitate an informed community discussion.

And third, we will establish a Referendum Council that's broadly reflective of the Australian people to progress a range of issues around constitutional change including how a question might be settled, timing and constitutional issues. This process should inform the further steps we take, including any constitutional conventions.

The Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition would receive regular reports from this Council and together with their respective party rooms, consider its final recommendations in developing a proposal to put to the Parliament, and if supported, the Australian people.

The Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet will properly support these new initiatives and they will be funded by the Government.

Constitutional recognition cannot address all the issues indigenous people face: this will remain a task for the government-of-the-day and for the parliament.

However constitutional recognition provides a chance for our generation to right an old wrong.

Success depends on all Australians embracing this opportunity and being involved in the path ahead.

Let us take these steps together.

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