

## **MEDIA RELEASE**



**1pm, 18 December, 2011**

## **Time to modernise our Constitution**

**Responding to media comments about proposed changes to the race power, ANTaR today urged all political parties to await the Expert Panel's final Report in January before ruling out particular reform options.**

"The Expert Panel has worked tirelessly over the last 12 months to consult broadly with the community and to ensure that its recommendations have community support and are legally sound," said Jacqueline Phillips, National Director,

"The Panel received over 3000 submissions which showed high levels of community support for changes to the Constitution to not only recognise Australia's First Peoples, but also to protect all Australian citizens from racial discrimination."

"It's time to bring our Constitution into the twenty-first Century. Our politicians should have nothing to fear from a provision which protects all Australians from racial discrimination. Many Australians believe this would bring our Constitution in line with contemporary values and with other modern Constitutions around the world."

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people around the country have made it clear that symbolic change, without addressing racial discrimination in our nation's founding document, would be a hollow gesture."

"If this is to be a process that advances reconciliation in this country and achieves practical outcomes for Australia's First Peoples, we must heed that message."

"Although there is a desire among many people to remove all references to race from the Constitution, we must ensure the ongoing validity of existing laws which currently rely on the race power, including native title legislation."

"A power to make laws for the advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples would achieve this purpose. It would also clarify that Governments cannot make special laws which are intended to be detrimental to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples."

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