

MEDIA RELEASE



Friday 27th October 2017

Extraordinary bad will in government rejection of Voice to Parliament

National advocacy organisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights ANTaR, today expressed dismay at the Prime Minister's outright rejection of the Referendum Council's proposal for a First Peoples Voice to parliament.

National Director Andrew Meehan said that the Prime Minister had not stayed true to his promise of 'doing things with Aboriginal people, not do things to them' with this unilateral decision of him and his cabinet.

"It beggars belief that after years of working in good faith, resulting in a considered proposal being delivered to Parliament by First Peoples, Prime Minister and Cabinet would throw the proposal out without any discussions with First Peoples or any further work on how the Voice could operate."

"It is unacceptable that not one meeting was held with National Congress of Australia's First Peoples - the national representative body, or members from the Referendum Council about this decision," he said.

He said that meeting with First Peoples to discuss the way forward on constitutional reform and the Makarrata process towards a treaty proposed by the Uluru Convention was essential and should be done as a matter of urgency.

"If we don't see some sort of process to discuss these issues with First Peoples, including as a first step the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, the government will be running the Indigenous portfolio off the tracks."

Mr Meehan also noted with concern that the Closing the Gap Refresh underway was yet to announce a process of structured engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to develop the way forward on the Closing the Gap Strategy.

"The Closing the Gap process is critical and must not be another 'government knows best' policy development process. It must be co-designed with First Peoples," he said.

ANTaR is the only non-Indigenous organisation dedicated solely to supporting the aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and working to educate the wider community, shape public opinion, and speak up for justice, rights and respect for Australia's First Peoples.