

Media Release



Wednesday 4 March 2015

Recognition proposal must accord with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples wishes

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights advocacy organisation, ANTaR, today called for government to urgently start consulting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on a proposal for constitutional recognition.

ANTaR National Director Andrew Meehan said that with extension of the Act of Recognition now imminent, government must set out a process and timeline for engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on this.

“It’s been three years since the Expert Panel made recommendations, it’s time for the government to get serious about engagement with First Peoples,” Mr Meehan said.

“As the Panel said then, any proposal must be of benefit to, and accord with, the wishes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – this is a prerequisite for moving towards a referendum,” he said.

Mr Meehan also highlighted that the Panel recommendations followed an extensive consultation process over a year that involved more than 250 community meetings, and 3500 submissions.

“The recommendations were based on widespread consultation. What Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people said was that they wanted substantive change that addressed discrimination,” he said.

With the extension of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Recognition Act imminent, it is now urgent that a clear process and timeframe for progressing the issue that includes strong engagement with First Peoples be established.

Such a process would include

- setting a timetable and process for the finalisation of the words that will be put to the people in a referendum,
- giving a commitment that those words will be meaningful recognition and address racial discrimination,
- committing to consult with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people about those words,
- making an agreement with all political parties to work together and continue the multiparty support for this change

Mr Meehan urged all parties to respect the rigorous work undertaken by the Expert Panel and the many calls from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leaders to address discrimination.

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.

Media contact: ANTaR National Director, Mr Andrew Meehan