

Statement on the Referendum outcome

22 October, 2023

We at ANтар are deeply saddened by the results of the Referendum for First Nations Recognition and Voice. We are sad for our First Nations friends, their leaders and communities. We are sad for the thousands of volunteers and campaigners who worked so hard for 'Yes'.

Mostly we are sad for the nation. Once again an opportunity to be more than a former colony of the British Empire has been missed, despite a proposition which was so gracious, modest, and accommodating to mainstream values.

Some days it is hard to breathe... particularly when we hear stories of First Nations people who feel lost and placeless in their own country.

We are hearing that for many, the unfolding events of Saturday, 14 October felt like an unparalleled act of racism by white Australia.

But there are more stories of resilience and resistance of leaders who won't back down.

There are many reasons why this referendum was lost, and the time for this analysis will come. The political gravity of not having bi-partisan support – despite that the constitutional change was designed so conservatives could support it. But it is clear from the lies that were peddled by the No campaign that dog whistling and misinformation were critical factors at play.

It only takes a seed of doubt to get someone to say 'no' to a change in our 'big law'.

We don't accept that this is the end of the movement for change. The Voice was only one mechanism for progressing First Nations rights and justice.

We do accept and affirm that close to 40 percent of the nation believes in 'Yes'.

We do accept and affirm that in booths where the majority of the population were First Nations people, there was overwhelming support for 'Yes'.

We also accept and affirm that there are over 60,000 volunteers who want to keep fighting, led by First Nations leaders, and this is a power for change that must now be harnessed. It gives us renewed hope for the Australia we must become.

ANTAR's campaign for Voice, Treaty and Truth continues. We will not back down. We will continue to work in partnership with First Nations communities and advocate for respecting their sovereignty, amplification of their voices, and the road to truth-telling and treaties for the nation.

We will stay the course towards, as First Nations community leader and academic Uncle Richard Frankland says, a 'Tomorrow Australia'.

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ANTAR is a national advocacy organisation working for justice, rights and respect for the First Nations Peoples of Australia. We do this primarily through campaigns, advocacy, and lobbying.

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ANTAR is proud to acknowledge and pay our respects to First Nations Peoples as the traditional owners of the lands on which we work across the continent.