

Voice to Parliament referendum question and constitutional amendment announced

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Anthony Albanese issues an emotional plea for Australians to support an Indigenous Voice to Parliament.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has announced the proposed question Australians will be asked at this year's referendum and the draft constitutional amendment that would enable an Indigenous Voice to Parliament.

Mr Albanese said the Referendum Working Group had landed on the question:

"A Proposed Law: to alter the Constitution to recognise the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice. Do you approve this proposed alteration?"

As well as that, it will be put to Australians that the constitution be amended to include a new chapter

Key points:

- The government will introduce legislation with the question wording to parliament next week
- It will be voted on by the parliament in June
- The wording is broadly in line with the draft Mr Albanese revealed at

titled "Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples".

Garma Festival last year

The details would be:

In recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of Australia:

1. There shall be a body, to be called the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice;
2. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice may make representations to the Parliament and the Executive Government of the Commonwealth on matters relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
3. The Parliament shall, subject to this Constitution, have power to make laws with respect to matters relating to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice, including its composition, functions, powers and procedures.

Mr Albanese made a tearful plea to Australians to support the Voice, saying it would help achieve better outcomes for First Nations people.

"If not now, when? This is an opportunity that doesn't belong to the [politicians], it belongs to every Australian equally," he said.

"One person, one vote. People from all faiths, backgrounds ... all of us will have equal say.

"All of us can own an equal share of what I believe will be an inspiring and unifying Australian moment."

Mr Albanese said the government would introduce legislation with the wording to parliament next Thursday and establish a joint parliamentary committee to consider it and receive submissions on the wording.

Parliament will then vote on the wording in June.

The prime minister said he had been asked if there was any way the Voice would not go to a vote.

"The answer to that is no because to not put this to a vote is to concede defeat," he said.

"You only win when you run on the field and engage, and let me tell you, my government is engaged. We're all in."

Wording could still change

The [announcement comes after Mr Albanese met with members of the Referendum Working Group](#) — which is made up of representatives of First Nations communities from around Australia — on Wednesday night to iron out an agreed position on the wording.

That group has spent months working toward an agreement on the wording, including removing the words "executive government" from the draft amendment but that suggestion was rejected.

The proposed constitutional amendment is broadly in line with what Mr Albanese outlined at the Garma Festival in the Northern Territory last year.

But it now specifically states parliament will have the power to decide on the composition, functions, powers and procedures of the Voice.

The wording announced on Thursday is not set in stone, though, and it could go through further changes when it is considered by parliament.

Meanwhile, the ABC has confirmed that the prime minister briefed the leaders of the Liberal and National parties before announcing the wording.

Opposition wants legal advice released

Opposition Leader Peter Dutton called for the solicitor-general's advice on the wording of the Voice referendum to be made public.

"From what we've read in media reports, the solicitor-general has concerns about these very words, and whilst there's been some cosmetic tweaking of them, there's not a substantive change in that regard," he said.

"In the absence of that advice, how can the Australian public make an informed judgement about a very, very important issue."

Mr Dutton said the Liberal Party had not made a decision about whether it would support the Voice.

"We want to contemplate, consider what the government's putting forward and look at the pros and cons ... and then we would make our decision as to whether we support it," he said.



Peter Dutton says the federal Liberals still have not decided if they will support the Voice referendum. *(ABC News: Mark Moore)*

The opposition leader again said he and his party had asked the government for more detail on the Voice and had not received an adequate response.

Those who have worked on the plan for the Voice, including former minister for Indigenous Australians Ken Wyatt, have [previously voiced their frustration at the argument there was not enough detail, saying it was "being used as an excuse" not to support the idea.](#)

Nationals leader David Littleproud said the release of the wording had not changed his party's position and he believed the Voice would add another layer of bureaucracy.

Mr. Littleproud said the mention of "Executive Government" in the design principles, would give the Voice more power than sitting federal ministers.

"I say to those living in capital cities today, just hear our voice, our understanding and experience and lived wisdom of what will shift the dial and close the gap, not what will divide us," he said.

'We need your help'

Tony McAvoy, a member of the Referendum Working Group, outlined the design principles of the proposal and said he hoped they would "go a long way to eradicating the fears that some people might have about this Voice".

They include that the Voice will give independent advice to parliament and government, the members of the Voice will be chosen by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, not members of parliament, it will be gender balanced and include young Australians, and be accountable and transparent, work alongside existing organisations and will not have a veto power.



Linda Burney holds back tears as she explains the meaning of a Voice to Parliament.

Minister for Indigenous Australians Linda Burney echoed the prime minister, saying it was a "truly historic day" for the nation.

"Today we take a big step forward on the long journey to constitutional recognition through Voice," she said.

"Constitutional recognition should be above politics.

"Recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the constitution will be a simple, but powerful, act. It will move Australia forward for everyone."

Special Envoy for Reconciliation and the Implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart Pat Dodson urged Australians to vote in favour of the Voice and take it as an opportunity to foster better relationships with Australia's First Nations people.

"The words that ring in my head from the Uluru Statement is the 'tyranny of our dispossession'," Senator Dodson said.

Senator Pat Dodson says the Voice would give Aboriginal Australians a voice on matters that affect them. *(ABC News: Tim Leslie)*

"Today is a clear example where the government and the Aboriginal leadership here have laid the foundation to actually give hope to the reversing of that tyranny.

"Because a successful referendum will give the Aboriginal peoples a voice to the parliament and to the executive on matters that affect them.

"This requires all Australians. We need your help."

Independent senator Lidia Thorpe said the federal government had endorsed a "powerless body they will call the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice, whilst our communities' voices are being ignored all around the country".

"It might sound lovely and may make people feel good, but this proposed Voice goes against the governance structures that have existed in our communities since time immemorial," Senator Thorpe said.

Senator Thorpe was one of a handful of representatives who walked out of talks that led to the Voice proposal in the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

The referendum has been the focus of parliament this week, with the machinery bill — which provides the rules for how the Voice referendum will work — passed in the Senate after the government struck a deal with the Coalition.

YOUTUBE: [Watch the press conference live.](#)