



## STATEMENT

### MARIST LEADERS SAY 'YES' TO INDIGENOUS RECOGNITION AND VOICE

5 October 2023

The Leaders of both the Marist Brothers Province in Australia and the Marist Association of St Marcellin Champagnat have declared their unanimous support for altering the Constitution in the upcoming referendum on Indigenous Recognition.

Provincial of the Marist Brothers, Brother Peter Carroll, says that support for indigenous recognition and a Voice to Parliament are not radical or new propositions.

“These are what indigenous leaders called for in the 2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart, and as Marist Leaders, we completely support the aspirations of our First Nations people expressed in that landmark document. There is nothing to fear in this proposed change.

“It is deeply disappointing that the referendum has been politicised; the division that has been sown is most regrettable and potentially damaging. For us, this Referendum is more an ethical issue than a political one.

“We call on Australians and our fellow Marists to focus on the real issues which underpin this important next step on our journey to true reconciliation with First Nations Australians.

“The Uluru Statement from the Heart asked for four things – **recognition, voice, treaty and makarrata** (truth telling). If successful, this referendum will deliver on two of them – *recognition* and *voice*. If we can’t deliver on these two in good faith, then dialogue about the other two will be near impossible.

“To us, the facts are clear:

“Indigenous Australians are the first nations of Australia. They have lived here for 60,000 years. Their lands were forcibly taken from them and their culture forever damaged. They should be recognised in the nation’s fundamental and foundational document. The 1999 referendum failed to deliver on recognition. We must deliver in 2023.

“Indigenous Australians are, by any measure, one of the most disadvantaged groups in the world. We haven’t ‘closed the gap’. We have a long way to go. Their opinions, ideas and suggestions about how this is to be achieved need to be heard; not in a politicised, adversarial fashion as we’re seeing now, but in a serious, respectful, bipartisan way. Some entity to express their voice is required, and this entity shouldn’t be such that it can be shut down in 3 or 5 years when it doesn’t suit a future government. Our indigenous sisters and brothers need a real, formal, continuing way of advising the Commonwealth government. It’s appropriate that the actual mechanism (how it is to operate and how it might change over time) is left to the Parliament to decide.

“As Marist leaders we believe that Indigenous Recognition and Voice need to be enshrined in our Constitution.

“This is our position as leaders; it’s not binding on anyone else. However, to lead is to take a stand. This, we believe, is the right stand for today”.

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