

Australian Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians - Position Statement

Background

Local Government NSW (LGNSW) has supported the principle of the Constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians since the campaign's inception; this support is in line with LGNSW Policy Statements.

Aboriginal Australians retain distinct cultural identities whether they live in urban, regional or remote areas of Australia. Local Government respects and acknowledges the unique culture, societies, history and traditional lands of Aboriginal Australians in NSW.

Australia is one of the few first world nations with a colonial history that does not recognise its Aboriginal population in the Constitution. It is of concern to many that Australia's Constitution does not recognise Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples' prior occupation and custodianship of their land.

Nationally efforts started in 2011 to have Aboriginal Australians recognised in Australia's Constitution. Local Government in NSW can be instrumental in this campaign as they are best connected to their communities at the grass roots level.

Current Situation

To date LGNSW has:

- Followed through Local Government and Shires Association Conference resolutions on support for Constitutional recognition of Aboriginal Australians.
- With our major stakeholder and member, the NSW Aboriginal Land Council, lobbied for the successful recognition of Aboriginal Australians in the NSW Constitution.
- Written submissions for NSW and National Constitutional recognition of Aboriginal Australians.
- Conveyed support for the National Constitution recognition of Aboriginal Australians to the Prime Ministers and Ministers for Aboriginal Affairs for National Constitution recognition of Aboriginal Australians.
- Highlighted the campaign at forums, workshops and through the Aboriginal Liaison council staff and councillor networks.

Way Forward

LGNSW will continue to support the Australian Constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and encourages all NSW councils to adopt their own position in support.

LGNSW believes that Constitutional change will build stronger relationships of trust and mutual respect between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians.

LGNSW commends the Australian government on its work in honouring and recognising the unique historical position of Aboriginal people and requests that the Australian Government:

- Conduct a referendum for Constitutional recognition of Aboriginal Australians at a time when it is likely to be supported by all major political parties, and a majority of State Governments.
- Continue to build community awareness on the importance of Constitutional recognition and to ensure opportunities are created to redress any disproportionate disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal people.
- Support Local Government to progress the constitution campaign at the local level and build support with non-Aboriginal political leaders that can advocate for the advancement of a referendum.
- Facilitate ongoing liaison with Aboriginal leaders and communities to promulgate key messages at a local level.
- Generate positive local publicity for the campaign.

LGNSW Requests

That the NSW government:

- Establish a NSW working party consisting of representatives of all major political parties at both State and Local level, and the Aboriginal Land Council to develop NSW wide approaches to spreading the message and informing communities of the benefits of Constitutional recognition.