

First Nations Voice in the Constitution Submission Barnardos Australia

Submitter Details

Barnardos Australia
60 - 64 Bay Street
ULTIMO NSW 2007

Barnardos Australia is a non denominational non government child and family services organisation which provides a broad range of family support, child care, youth support, child protection and out of home care services to vulnerable children, young people and their families in NSW and the ACT. In 2019/20 Barnardos assisted 13,654 children and their families.

Our services assist many Aboriginal children, young people and their families to continue to care for their children within their family networks and communities. Barnardos aspires to build its cultural safety for the Aboriginal children and families we serve and for the Aboriginal people who work for us. We continue to develop our governance structures, Aboriginal staff support processes and service delivery models, policies and procedures in response to advice and direct input from our Aboriginal staff and the Aboriginal people we support.

The principle of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self determination fundamentally guides our efforts to improve our organisation's cultural safety. The voices of our Aboriginal staff, our Aboriginal community controlled partners and the families we serve increasingly guide us to be more responsive and to do better to reduce the numbers of Aboriginal children entering the out of home care system and to keep them connected to family, community and Country.

Therefore Barnardos supports the Indigenous Voice co-design groups, who in partnership with the National Indigenous Australians Agency recommend to the Australian Government a model for an Indigenous Voice to Parliament. This Voice would give First Nations people a direct say on laws, policies and services that impact them. The National Voice would engage early with Parliament in developing relevant laws and policies that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and would share in planning and decision making with Government. Listening early and systematically to First Nations people and communities via local and regional Voice mechanisms which feed into a National Voice to Parliament would significantly and progressively improve First Nations self determination and positively impact the Closing the Gap targets.

Ultimately a First Nations Voice to Parliament which is Constitutionally based would provide a secure and enduring mechanism for our First People to directly influence our laws, policies and services which affect them.

Barnardos Australia:

1. Calls on the Australian Government to honour its election commitment to a referendum once a model for the Voice has been settled
2. Calls for enabling legislation for the Voice to be passed after a referendum has been held in the next term of Parliament

3. Calls for a membership model for the National Voice that ensures previously unheard Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the same chance of being selected as established leadership figures.

The option of membership of the National Voice being comprised of representative voices from local and regional bodies would enable a rich diversity of Indigenous people across the Australian mainland and the Torres Strait to be heard.

Barnardos Australia

31st March 2021