



22 September 2023

THE COALITION AND THE REFERENDUM

Dear

We are disturbed by the No case's information about the Voice to Parliament and circulated to the nation via Coalition Senators recently. The blatant appeal to fear and the levels of inaccuracy in your arguments show that [facts are not a priority](#) for the No case.

It is misleading to claim that the Voice to Parliament is "**legally risky**" as the great majority of legal experts and constitutional lawyers maintain that it is dependable and sound.

The claim that there are no **details** is designed to mislead voters. Necessary details about the wording, the required explanatory material, amendment reports, the Solicitor-General's legal advice and the advice of expert working groups are available. The [design principles](#) evolved from this advice.

The Australian Constitution defines the powers of the parliament, the executive government and the judiciary, and yet it does not prescribe the numbers of members of the House of Representatives, nor does it even mention the office of Prime Minister. In Part 5.51 there is a list of 39 matters over which the Federal Parliament is given legislative power, yet no detail is given as to the departments or other bodies required for their administration, as that is the Parliament's task. The Voice to Parliament will be no different, as you well know.

The Voice will not, of itself, be **divisive**. People in different circumstances should receive different treatment according to their needs. The Indigenous peoples of Australia have been treated differently since 1788, but in ways that caused suffering rather than respect and growth. The division that accompanied the arrival of Europeans will be addressed positively by the Voice as the people will finally have a say in their future. Bipartisan support would have assisted the nation to discard the policy failures of the past, but instead, the Liberal Party chose unnecessary politicisation.

We wonder how it can be seriously stated that a Voice "**won't help Indigenous Australians**". How do you know it won't work? Nothing like this has been tried, by either major party. The Liberal Party was founded in 1944 and has been in office twice as long as Labor since that time. That party therefore has had twice as long to address Indigenous disadvantage. The lack of progress is a shame on our nation.

The blanket statement that "**no issue is beyond its scope**" is another inaccuracy designed to alarm people. The Voice will only be able to deal with issues relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. They have quite enough problems, seeing that they are worse off than other Australian groups. The facts speak for themselves – regarding education, employment, housing, health, life expectancy and incarceration, Indigenous peoples face greater disadvantage than others.

The assertion that the Voice "**risks delays and dysfunction**" is incorrect. You know as well as we do that it will be the Parliament that decides whether or not the advice of the Voice is taken. While the High Court is part of our system and may be called upon where necessary, the likelihood of its involvement is no greater in this than for any other matter. Again, as with your other objections, you play on fear by proposing outcomes that have very small chances of eventuating.

You maintain that **activists** will have the “door” opened to them. What “door”? All Australians have the right to protest about matters of concern, but again, decisions rest with the Parliament and the government of the time. Again you appeal to fear.

Your assertion that the Voice will be “**costly and bureaucratic**” ignores the waste of money that successive governments have spent on programmes that were erected without reference to the people who were to be served by them. History shows how councils or projects established by one Federal government have been dismantled by the next. Money wasted. Funding for programs that flow from the willingness of Parliament to listen to the Indigenous peoples’ advice will be better used.

You appeal to further fear in stating that the Voice will be “**permanent**”. The operation of the Voice will be determined and overseen by Parliament, as all the matters listed in the Constitution under Federal jurisdiction are. Should there come a time when the Voice is seen to be not needed, it can be abolished by referendum.

Finally, you claim that there are “**better ways forward**”. If that is so, what are they? Why did you not introduce them during the decades you were in power?

If you really believe that the referendum should be defeated, why haven’t you presented some reasons that are based on fact and supported by research instead of these negative conjectures appealing to people’s fear, misunderstanding and prejudice?

We are strongly for the Yes position. It will not be perfect; nothing is. But it will be a positive effort to accede to the request of our Indigenous peoples. It will be a break with a past littered with too many hapless projects which failed because we didn’t listen to the people. Voting Yes will improve Australia’s international standing as a nation that values all its peoples and honestly faces its past. A vote for Yes is a vote for a better future.

It is not too late for you to support the Yes campaign. We are encouraged by the conscientious public stand taken by your colleagues Bridget Archer and Julian Leaser. You could do that too. You could say “No” to the misleading, inaccurate prophecies of doom that are your party’s policy that are confusing and dividing the population. You could vote Yes for a better Australia.

Australia matters. The future matters. The children, all of them, matter. **Truth matters.**

We would like a reply to this letter.

Yours sincerely,

Sister Susan Connelly and members of the Josephite Justice Network gathered in Sydney 15-17 Sept.
14 Yerrick Road Lakemba NSW 2195

<i>Name</i>	<i>Postcode</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Postcode</i>
Kathleen O’Connor	2134	Kay McPadden	4006
Vivienne Luke	7005	Clare Conaglen	2060
Emilia Nicholas	2196	Therese McGarry	2131
Elizabeth Love	2134	Kenise Neill	5033
Carmel Hanson	2292	Laraine Crowe	2132
Marion Gambin	2558	Adrienne Gallie	2060
Ruby King	2206	Margaret Daly	5033
Beverley Turello	2611	Josephine Mitchell	2195
Mary McDonnell	2558	Maria Sullivan	2145
Jan Barnett	2195	Violet Cabral	2213