

From little things big things grow.

What does this mean? Is it just a catchy tune, or is it way of thinking, of living, of achieving. Although, our First People yearn for the justice that would come with a Treaty, as it has for every other first world country that went through colonisation - Australia's history shows that, when it comes to full recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and ending discrimination against them, it takes small steps. There was the bark petition of 1963; the Wave Hill walk off in 1966; the Aboriginal Tent embassy in 1972; the referendum in 1967; the Mabo decision in 1992; and the Apology to the Stolen Generations in 2008.

The next step towards full recognition would have to be a preamble to the Constitution stating Australia's firm commitment to equality for all and recognition of the traditional custodians of the land, who for thousands of years cared for and protected it.

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Our preamble could be something like South Africa's ... Imagine this:

We, the people of Australia,

Recognise the injustices inflicted on our First Peoples in our past;

Honour those who suffered resisting injustice and fighting for freedom in our land;

Respect those who have worked to build, develop and unify our country; and

Believe that Australia can only belong to all if we listen to and respect the First Nations who are custodians of this land.

United in our diversity.

We therefore, through our freely elected representatives, adopt this Constitution as the supreme law of Australia so as to -

- Heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights;
- and lay the foundations for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is equally protected by law...

This could be our first step.

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The Australian Constitution reflects the values and priorities which were prevalent at Federation - and they were those of the White Australia Policy and a philosophy of assimilation. As Noel Pearson has said, "It contains no inspirational flourishes or rhetorical appeals to individual liberty. Instead, in dry, measured and calculated text, it embodies the three unifying aspects of federation in Australia: loyalty to the Crown, strong belief in God and the shared need to provide national unity for white Australians through the introduction of a federal government".

Unlike the uplifting American Bill of Rights, the Australian Constitution does not recognise the traditional custodians of this land. If we hold the proposed referendum and it is passed, imagine this, it would be an opportunity to have every child in Australia know, and be proud of, the words which acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land

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The Australian Constitution ignores the presence of Aboriginal peoples prior to European settlement. It also permits the Commonwealth Parliament to validly enact laws that are racially discriminatory and contemplates disqualifying people from voting on the basis of their race.

This is discrimination is found in sections 25 and 51 of the Australian Constitution. These parts of the constitution mean that the Government is able to enforce laws that control Aboriginal lives and their communities in a way that damages them. At the moment, around 150 Aboriginal communities are threatened with being shut down in Western Australia. Hundreds of Aboriginal Australians are on the brink of being

denied the land and culture they are most connected to, and forced to live in large cities in unsafe, poor and unhygienic areas leading lives without meaning.

We, therefore, not only need a preamble, but clauses in the Constitution that end the possibility of discrimination in our laws, then we would be one step closer to a reconciliation ... and one step closer to justice ... one step closer to a treaty which would fully recognise the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Let's take these steps into a future in which our nation can be truly egalitarian.

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