



19 April 2023

Committee Secretary
Joint Select Committee on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice Referendum
PO BOX 6201
Canberra ACT 2600

Via email: jscvr@aph.gov.au

Dear Secretary

Inquiry into the *Constitution Alteration (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice) 2023* (the Bill)

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the proposed alterations contained in the Bill.

The Australian Pro Bono Centre (**'the Centre'**) is the national centre of leadership for pro bono legal services, aiming to grow participation and excellence in pro bono. More information on the strategies the Centre uses to achieve this can be found in its [Strategic Plan](#).

The Centre's Support for the Proposed Alterations

The Centre supports the proposed alterations to the Constitution to include 'Chapter IX—Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' and its section 129 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice' for the following reasons:

1. The proposed alterations are fit for purpose, are legally sound and should not be changed. They deliver on the invitation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart to enshrine an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice in the Constitution. The Voice has been sought by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through comprehensive consultation over 12 years.
2. The Centre supports self-determination and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in this way. The Centre has publicly supported the Uluru Statement from the Heart.¹ In 2021 the Centre also provided a submission in response to the Interim Report to the Australian Government: Indigenous Voice Co-Design Process.²
3. The Centre works to close the access to justice gap and to create a more equitable society. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples face some of the greatest barriers to justice and are overrepresented in our justice system. Their need for legal support is demonstrated by the Centre's [8th National Law Firm Pro Bono Survey](#) (2022) which found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were the client group most supported by the national pro bono sector.
4. By placing empowerment and self-determination first, the proposed alterations to enshrine the Voice in the Constitution will begin to address the systemic barriers to justice facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is important that these alterations are enshrined in the Constitution and permit the Voice to speak to both the Executive and Parliament so that the Voice is protected from encroachment and can enact long-

¹ See Centre website page [here](#).

² See Centre submission [here](#).

lasting, deep change. Transformative, institutional reform is required to ensure First Nations peoples have a voice and to ensure they are formally unified with other Australians within the democratic framework of our state.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gabriela Christian-Hare". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'G' and 'H'.

Gabriela Christian-Hare
Chief Executive Officer