

# Remarks at meeting with Energy Retailers

**PRIME MINISTER:** Good morning and thank you for joining us today. I am here with the Deputy Prime Minister, the Treasurer and the Minister for Energy.

Now, your companies provide a vital and essential service to around 8 million Australian households and businesses.

Australians are paying, right now, too much for energy.

There are millions of Australian households that are on plans that are the wrong plans. We know from the ACCC research and so many other works of research that we've had. We know that people are being left on standing offers that are too high for what they can afford.

So we've got to get today a better deal for Australian families. We want you to work with us to deliver a better deal for Australian families.

We are blessed with abundant sources of energy, many of you are generators as well and you understand that but the fact is that they're paying higher prices than ever before and too many Australian families are under real financial stress as a result.

We need a better deal. We know that, for example, the gap between the best and worst offers that a household can have can range from \$900 to \$1,500 a year depending on the household. And even within a particular company, with an individual company of yours, the gap can be between the best and the standard offer up to \$400 a year.

So the fact is millions of Australian families are paying too much for their electricity.

Now what we want to do is see that you work with us to protect your customers to make sure that they know what is the best deal for them, how they can ensure that they are paying no more for electricity than they need to.

We believe that is in your interest, it's in the public's interest, it's in the nation's interest.

We must ensure that Australian's are paying no more for electricity and energy than they should, than they need to. We need your help to deliver that.

After all your customers, the consumers that you serve, they are the foundation of your business. We want to work with you to care for them.

So let's work now, come up with some outcomes and we can say that we going to protect, you are going to protect the customers you have to ensure that they get the best deal and pay no more for electricity and energy than they need

to.

So thank you very much for being here, and we look forward to a good and frank discussion.

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## Press Conference with Senator the Hon. Mathias Cormann, Acting Special Minister of State

**PRIME MINISTER:** Good afternoon. I am here with Senator Cormann, the Acting Special Minister of State.

At the last election, we made a very clear promise to the Australian people that we would not facilitate the introduction of a bill to legalise same-sex marriage until the Australian people had had their say.

And we made a commitment to give all Australians a say on the matter of same-sex marriage and we did so again and again.

Now, typically Bill Shorten during the course of the election campaign did not say where he stood. He reserved his position so he was able characteristically to tell people that opposed a plebiscite that he would be with them and that those that favoured it that he might be with them also.

Since the election, we have come back into government, we have gone to the Parliament, gone through the House, we've gone to the Senate with a bill to enable a compulsory attendance ballot, a plebiscite. And that has been rejected by the Senate.

We will be presenting it to the Senate again this week.

But if that bill is rejected by the Senate again, then we will hold a postal vote on this issue asking the same question in which all Australians will have their say – they will get the opportunity to express their opinion on the issue of whether the law should be changed to enable same-sex couples to marry, fulfilling the commitment we made at the election.

Now, fundamental to political leadership is integrity and trust. We all know what happens to governments that break their promises.

We all remember Julia Gillard's 'There will be no carbon tax under the government I lead', and how she broke that promise and what followed.

Now, we have made a very clear commitment here and we are sticking with it.

It's been considered in both our party rooms – in the Liberal Party Room and

the National Party Room – and both our party rooms, as you know, overwhelmingly support the commitment that we made.

And today in the Joint Party Room we presented and had, again, overwhelming support for the option of the postal vote.

And that will, again, operate in the same way in terms of its impact on the Parliament's work as the plebiscite proposal that will be going back into the Senate this week, that is to say if there is a 'yes' vote recorded in the postal vote then we will facilitate the introduction of a Private Members Bill to legalise same-sex marriage. And if there is a 'no' vote we will not.

I'll now ask the Acting Special Minister of State to go into some more detail on the mechanism.

**SENATOR THE HON. MATHIAS CORMANN, ACTING SPECIAL MINISTER OF STATE:** Thank you very much Prime Minister. The Government went to the last election with a very firm commitment that we would give the Australian people a say on whether or not the definition of marriage in the Marriage Act should be changed to allow same sex couples to marry. After the election we introduced legislation into the Parliament to give effect to that commitment and that reflected our preferred option, which was a compulsory attendance plebiscite. That legislation was unsuccessful in the Senate. I will be giving notice in the Senate today of a motion to restore that plebiscite Bill back to the notice paper and to recommence, to revive the second reading debate in relation to that Bill.

Should that attempt be unsuccessful, the government believes that we have a Constitutional and legal way forward to keep faith with our commitment to the Australian people to let them have their say on whether or not the definition of marriage should be changed. Under our Constitution, the Commonwealth Parliament has the power to make laws in relation to census and statistics. The Commonwealth Parliament has made laws in relation to census and statistics, namely the Census and Statistics Act and the ABS Act. Under those pieces of legislation and the undoubted Constitutional powers of the Commonwealth, the Treasurer will be directing the Australian Statistician to ask, to request on a voluntary basis information, statistical information, from all Australians on the electoral roll as to their views on whether or not the law in relation to same sex marriage should be changed to allow same sex couples to marry.

Incidentally, there is a precedent in Australia for an Australian Government asking Australians for their opinion in relation to a matter of public policy. Namely the Whitlam Government in 1974, conducted a phone survey of 60,000 randomly selected Australians through the ABS as to what their view was in relation to Australia's national anthem. At the end of that process 51.4 per cent of Australians so surveyed by the ABS opted for the Australian national anthem to be changed to Advance Australia Fair. This is essentially the same process using the same Constitutional head of power, using the relevant legislation underpinning the operations of the ABS and the Australian Statistician. The ABS has the power. The ABS has the power to expend funds in relation to its functions under its legislation.

As the Finance Minister, I have the power to make the relevant appropriation to the ABS. I pause here under the Appropriations Act, the current Appropriations Act passed by the Parliament, there is what is called a Finance Ministers advance, a long-standing arrangement that has been in place under governments of both political persuasion, where I am able to make appropriations under certain circumstances of up to \$295 million. That is more than enough to be able to fund the postal plebiscite should the Senate not support the government's preferred scenario, the government's preferred option of a compulsory attendance plebiscite.

The ABS has the power, I have the power to appropriate the necessary funds. Furthermore, the ABS under its legislation is able to enter into an arrangement with other Commonwealth entities in relation to the secondment of officers to the ABS. There will be an arrangement between the ABS and the Australian Electoral Commission under those provisions in the ABS legislation for Electoral Commission officers to be seconded to the ABS to assist the Australian Statistician in conducting this process. This is a process that will enable every single Australian on the electoral roll to have their say on whether or not they believe our laws should be changed to allow same sex couples to marry or not.

**JOURNALIST:** Prime Minister, how much will it cost? And do you have the legal advice to back it and how confident are you that you can contend this in the High Court if necessary – the postal vote?

**PRIME MINISTER:** The answers to your question in reverse order are yes we are confident. Two, yes we do have legal advice. And the cost is-

**ACTING SPECIAL MINISTER OF STATE:** \$122 million.

**JOURNALIST:** I take your point about the election promise. I was on the campaign, I heard you talk about it many times.

**PRIME MINISTER:** Poor you!

**JOURNALIST:** Well, indeed, however I never heard you promise a postal plebiscite. I never heard you mention a plan B – so it is not really an election promise. Isn't this an issue where the country is crying out for leadership? Isn't a postal plebiscite just a way to have the Parliament follow? Why aren't you leading? Why are you following?

**PRIME MINISTER:** Strong leaders carry out their promises. Weak leaders break them.

I'm a strong leader. I made that promise again and again, as you lamented, on the campaign trail, on that long campaign. And you heard me, again, say again and again that every Australian will have a say on this issue.

Now, we have sought to have a compulsory attendance plebiscite. The only reason it has not been held is because of Bill Shorten's opposition.

This is the same Bill Shorten, Mark, that went to the Australian Christian Lobby in 2013 and said he favoured a plebiscite.

Bill Shorten has a habit of telling any audience he goes to what they want to hear and he went to the ACL in 2013 and he said the people should make up their minds on this. Yes, he said – he supported a plebiscite, you've all got the video, you've all run it-

**JOURNALIST:** But you also promised-

**PRIME MINISTER:** And in the campaign he did not say whether he would support or oppose our plebiscite proposal.

So in the campaign the only statement of his on the record about a plebiscite was supporting one, so voters were entitled to expect that he would be consistent – those that didn't know him as well as everyone in this room does.

So he's come back and for purely political reasons he has opposed the plebiscite. If he had not opposed it it would've been held in February and in my view it would have been carried, in which case same-sex marriage by now would have been legal for some time.

Bill Shorten is the barrier to that.

So the postal vote, however, will give everybody their say. Everyone will get a say.

**ACTING SPECIAL MINISTER OF STATE:** Let me make a very important point in response to your question too, Mark. The commitment that the government made in the lead up to the last election and the commitment that the Prime Minister made in the lead up to the last election was to give the Australian people a say on whether the definition of marriage should be changed through a plebiscite. We did not actually determine the specifics on what form that plebiscite would take until after the election. It is true that we determined after the election that our preferred approach would be a compulsory attendance plebiscite. But there is absolutely no doubt that a postal plebiscite still keeps faith with the commitments that we made in the lead up to the last election on this point.

**JOURNALIST:** You must be very confident that same-sex marriage would be legalised had that plebiscite gone ahead – do you remain as confident as you were?

**PRIME MINISTER:** Yes, that is my sense of it Mark, of public opinion but ultimately that's just an opinion. The important thing is that every Australian gets their say. So every Australian, as Mathias said, on the electoral role will get a ballot paper and they will be to fill that in and express their say and their vote will be counted.

**JOURNALIST:** Prime Minister, if we could stop talking about Bill Shorten for a moment and actually talk about the issue – you support same-sex marriage, why? And will you campaign for it and campaign for change during this plebiscite?

**PRIME MINISTER:** Well I have explained why I support it – because I believe

that relationships, marriages should be available to people like Lucy and me, people of different sex, different men and women and also to people of the same-sex.

Look, other people have different views on that fundamental issue and I respect their views and they're entitled to them and I will certainly, as I've said before in respect to the plebiscite that is before the Senate, that I will be voting yes, as will Lucy, and I'd encourage others to do so.

**JOURNALIST:** Why subject the gay and lesbian community to two, nearly two months of people commenting on their relationships and saying hurtful things?

**PRIME MINISTER:** There are arguments against having a plebiscite, I understand that. There are arguments against it but the weakest argument of all, which I think has no basis, is that the Australian people are not capable of having a respectful discussion on this issue.

I mean, do we think so little of our fellow Australians and our ability to debate important matters of public interest that we say: 'You're not able to have a respectful discussion about the definition of marriage', which is a very significant, important, fundamental element in our law and in our culture.

Australians are able and have demonstrated that they can have a respectful discussion. I am committed to that.

Now, there are plenty of other arguments about plebiscites for and against, but that one that you've just described, Sam, is the weakest of them all.

**JOURNALIST:** Prime Minister, your own office has brought in this device into this press conference – called a Mevo, apparently it live streams to Facebook.

**PRIME MINISTER:** Yes.

**JOURNALIST:** The Facebook community-

**PRIME MINISTER:** Are you offended by that? Is this because you're from the ABC? You're offended by that? Does the Internet threaten you?

**JOURNALIST:** The Facebook generation –

**PRIME MINISTER:** Yes?

**JOURNALIST:** – are classically and very typically people who have moved on in the debate. They might not have ever posted a letter.

**PRIME MINISTER:** I think they'll all be looking forward to having their say.

**JOURNALIST:** What do you say to the Facebook generation who say: "How do we vote? Should we vote?"

**PRIME MINISTER:** Have your say. Have your say. I mean, I am encouraging them

to have their say.

**JOURNALIST:** Prime Minister if the plebiscite returns a 'no' note and your government decides not to pursue the issue in Parliament, do you have any reason to believe that the MPs who've expressed support for a conscience vote won't still follow through on their threat to cross the floor?

**PRIME MINISTER:** Well we obviously, we always encourage – I, our leadership, the party – we encourage all of our members always to vote in accordance with government policy, with the decisions of the Party Room. So that is the answer to that.

**JOURNALIST:** PM can I just ask for some specifics, could you give us the dates for both the plebiscite and the dates for the postal ballot? Will there be public funding for a postal ballot for the 'yes' and 'no' cases if it is a postal ballot? And just personally, will you personally campaign for the 'yes' vote?

**PRIME MINISTER:** I will answer the last one – I have many other calls on my time as Prime Minister but I will certainly support a 'yes' vote, as I've said I would in the past, but I have many other calls to my time.

I just make this point and Sarah Martin knows this well because she accompanied me on my trip to Western Australia recently – in the course of that trip, I would think, Sarah, I would have met close to 1,000 people, hundreds of people, all the time, in many different environments, some of them organised, most of them not. In the course of that visit, to the best of my recollection one person raised the issue of same-sex marriage other than journalists.

So I have many calls on my time – national security, energy, the economy, ensuring that Australians have the security and the opportunity they deserve.

There's a very, one of the newspapers, I think it was *The Courier-Mail* on the front cover today said, referring to the anticipated decision of the Party Room, gave us the advice: 'Now get back to running the country'. Can I tell you, that is my focus – running the country, securing Australians' security, keeping them safe and ensuring they and their children have great opportunities to get ahead.

**JOURNALIST:** Can I get the details?

**ACTING SPECIAL MINISTER OF STATE:** If the Senate supports the government's preferred option of a compulsory attendance plebiscite, that would take place on the 25 November, the Saturday before the final sitting fortnight. In the case of such a compulsory attendance plebiscite, if it returned a majority yes vote, as the government has indicated we would then facilitate the consideration of a Private Member's Bill in the final sitting fortnight. If that is not successful and we pursue the alternative postal vote option, our timetable is to secure a final result by the 15 November, which equally would facilitate consideration for the final sitting fortnight of the relevant Private Member's Bill should the plebiscite vote be positive. The intention

would be to have ballot papers arrive in people's letterboxes from 12 September onwards. All of the relevant timetables will be published in the usual way.

**JOURNALIST:** On enrolments, will young people who have turned 18 since the last election have the time by the 12th of September to enrol to vote? Is there a chance for them to enrol and vote?

**ACTING SPECIAL MINISTER OF STATE:** There will be appropriate provision consistent with the provision that usually applies for electors and potential electors to update their enrolment details and all the specific announcements will be made in the usual way.

**JOURNALIST:** Prime Minister and Minister, can I ask both how you would feel about a 'no' vote in the public?

**PRIME MINISTER:** Just from my own – I will respect the decision of the Australian people.

As I've said to you, I'll be voting 'yes', as will Lucy. I'm very open about that.

But if the Australian people vote, the Australian people are never wrong. You know, when they vote, whether it's for governments or on matters like this, their vote will be respected.

We've been very clear about this, we will facilitate a Private Members Bill to change the law with respect to same-sex marriage so that same-sex couples can be married if there's a 'yes' vote. And if it is a 'no' vote, we won't. Mathias, do you want to add to that?

**ACTING SPECIAL MINISTER OF STATE:** I am on the public record as indicating that I will respect whatever the verdict of the Australian public through this process. I will respect the yes or the no vote.

**JOURNALIST:** Can I just talk about the turnout? I mean, how many people need to vote for this to have any legitimacy? I mean less 50 per cent? If you get 10 per cent it will be seen as a fizzer, won't it?

**PRIME MINISTER:** Well, a vote in which every Australian is given an opportunity to vote –

**ACTING SPECIAL MINISTER OF STATE:** 100 per cent.

**PRIME MINISTER:** Is – 100 per cent – everyone on the electoral roll will be getting a ballot paper and that is where its legitimacy comes from.

Compulsory voting which as you know, we have in Australia, obviously, and a number of other countries have it, it is not the norm, it is the exception to the norm. Most countries have voluntary voting systems and in fact there are people that advocate it here. And postal voting is very common in Australia for many organisations, unions, companies and local government.



**JOURNALIST:** [Interjections]

**JOURNALIST:** How much is a full plebiscite as opposed to \$122 million?

**PRIME MINISTER:** Mathias.

**ACTING SPECIAL MINISTER OF STATE:** It is a matter of public record. A full compulsory attendance plebiscite is up to \$170 million. A postal plebiscite and it does depend on participation, is up to \$122 million.

**PRIME MINISTER:** Thank you all very much. Mathias will put out more details.

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## New United Nations and Australian Sanctions against North Korea

The Australian Government welcomes the unanimous adoption by the United Nations Security Council of new substantial measures against North Korea overnight.

Australia will move quickly to implement the new resolution and today announces new measures to support the international action.

The UN Security Council decision demonstrates clear international unity and resolve on the need to respond to continuing illegal and provocative actions by North Korea, which pose a major threat to international peace and security.

The new UN Security Council resolution implements a full ban on North Korea's export of coal, iron, lead and seafood – which account for up to a third of North Korea's exports – and bans new work permits for North Korean migrant workers.

The resolution also freezes assets and introduces travel bans on others involved in activities assisting North Korea.

Together, these measures will impose significant costs on Pyongyang's continuing illegal behaviour, and further constrain its ability to fund its weapons programs.

The Australian Government urges all UN Member States to take immediate steps to implement these measures.

In support of international efforts on North Korea, Australia will also apply targeted financial sanctions and travel bans on several additional individuals and seven entities under Australia's autonomous sanctions regime. Australia will also continue to work with our ASEAN partners and the United States, Japan, the Republic of Korea and China to uphold global peace and

stability.

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## Doorstop at Garma 2017

**PRIME MINISTER:** We've had some great discussions here at Garma. Learning a lot, doing a lot of listening and quite a bit of talking as you've heard but also plenty of listening. I want to thank again Galarrwuy Yunupingu in particular for the welcome that he's given us here and his family and the Gumatj people here. It's been fantastic.

So thank you for that.

**JOURNALIST:** Prime Minister, can I just ask – do you personally support the idea of an Indigenous voice in the Constitution?

**PRIME MINISTER:** We understand the cry from the heart that came from Uluru. It was, as I said in my remarks, it is a serious proposal that we will consider seriously and we're going to thoughtfully and respectfully consider it.

Changing the Constitution is a very big challenge and I won't give my speech again, but you can understand we're taking this serious proposal very seriously indeed.

**JOURNALIST:** Will you commit to a Joint Parliamentary Committee?

**PRIME MINISTER:** We will consider the matter carefully through our own Cabinet process. This is a, as I said, we were presented with the report on the 30th of June. We met with the Referendum Council two weeks ago. And it will be coming to our Cabinet and we will be discussing it with our colleagues shortly.

**JOURNALIST:** The Opposition Leader has said that he could commit to a referendum question by the end of the year. Do you think that timeline is realistic?

**PRIME MINISTER:** History would suggest that is very ambitious. Again, changing the Constitution is very challenging. I talked about the Republic Referendum in '99 – remember there was another proposition in that referendum which was supported by all political parties, which got an even lower vote. So as I said bipartisanship is a necessary condition but it is far from being a sufficient one.

Also it is very important to look at the success of the most successful referendum in 1967 where there was, it was well understood, it was clear, it was simple, it was precise. Precision and clarity, simplicity are your friends when you're proposing changes to the Australian Constitution. But above all you need to have overwhelming support, overwhelming support for it.

So there is a lot of work to be done. There has been a great deal of work as a number of the speakers have observed on recognition and removing racially discriminatory language from the Constitution, recognising our First Australians in the Constitution. The voice proposal is not without precedent or therefore new in that respect but it is a relatively new proposal in the context of this debate.

Again, there is, this process of Makarrata, and it is a process, it is a process – this is going to take some time.

If you want to be successful, if you want to achieve, if you want to listen and feel the cry from the heart from Uluru and respond to it, effectively and positively as leaders should with the responsibility and respect that cry deserves, then it will be undertaken, our response will be undertaken with great care and great deliberation.

**JOURNALIST:** Will you commit, Prime Minister, to build that support for an Indigenous voice to Parliament? You say it has to have overwhelming support. You're the Prime Minister, with respect. Galarrwuy Yunupingu says he has trust in you, he's convinced the other Indigenous leadership to trust in you. So can they trust in you to build that support overwhelmingly with the public?

**PRIME MINISTER:** Everyone here and every Australian can trust in me to lead Australia in the national interest, to remember that we represent all of us, 24 million Australians –

**JOURNALIST:** But I asked you about the Indigenous voice.

**PRIME MINISTER:** And recognize, and recognise that as we respond to this proposal we must do so in a way that respects the seriousness of what is proposed and the care with which it should be addressed – the statement from Uluru is a statement from the heart. As I said in my remarks, it is a piece of poetry. The challenge now is turning it into prose.

**JOURNALIST:** Prime Minister, don't you think our elders and First Nations people around the country have waited long enough? You said you're going to consider these recommendations – how much longer is it going to take? They want action and a response.

**PRIME MINISTER:** We've had them for about a month. So serious proposals deserve serious consideration and serious consultation. There is a great diversity of views as you know from Indigenous Australians and indeed from all Australians. So serious proposals deserve serious consideration and that is what my government will do.

Thank you all very much.

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# Address at Garma 2017

## **PRIME MINISTER:**

*Ngarra buku-wurrpan bukmak nah! Nhuma'lanah.*

*Ngarra Prime Minister numalagu djal Ngarra yurru wanganharra'wu nhumalangu bukmak'gu marrigithirri.*

*Ngarra ga nhungu dharok ga manikay' ngali djaka wanga'wu yirralka.*

I acknowledge and pay respect to your country, and your elders.

As Prime Minister, I'm here to talk to you and learn from you.

I acknowledge and respect your language, your song lines, your dances, your culture, your caring for country, and your estates.

I pay my respects to the Gumatj people and traditional owners past, present and future, on whose land we are gathered.

I also acknowledge other Yolngu people, First Peoples from across the country and balanda here today including Bill Shorten, Nigel Scullion and all other Parliamentary colleagues but above all I acknowledge our Parliamentary colleagues, Indigenous Parliamentary colleagues. Truly, voices of First Australians in the Parliament. Thank you for being here today and for the wisdom you give us, you together with my dear friend Ken, so much wisdom in the Parliament.

I offer my deep respect and gratitude to the Chairman of the Yothu Yindi Foundation, Dr Galarrwuy Yunupingu for hosting Lucy and me with your family. It was lovely to camp here last night and the last music was beautiful, serene and like a lullaby sending us all off to our dreams. Thank you. Emily was the last singer – beautiful. And of course we woke here to the beautiful sounds of Gulkala.

I again as I did yesterday extend our deep condolences to the family of Dr G Yunupingu at this very sad time. He brought the Yolngu language to the people of Australia and his music will be with us forever.

I've come here to North East Arnhem Land to learn, participate respectfully and can I thank everyone so far I've had the chance to talk with. I am filled with optimism about our future together as a reconciled Australia.

Last month scientists and researchers revealed new evidence that our First Australians have been here in this land for 65,000 years.

These findings show that Indigenous people were living at the Madjedbebe rock shelter in Mirarr Country, at Kakadu east of Darwin, 18,000 years earlier than previously thought.

Among the middens, rock paintings, remains, plants and ochre, was the world's oldest-known ground-edge axe head.

These findings place Australia on centre stage in the story of human origin, including mankind's first long-distance maritime voyage – from Southeast Asia to the Australian continent.

Our First Peoples are shown as artistically, as technologically advanced, and at the cutting edge of technology in every respect.

Importantly, they confirm what Aboriginal people have always known and we have known – that your connection, your intimate connection to the land and sea are deep, abiding, ancient, and yet modern.

This news is a point of great pride for our nation. We rejoice in it, as we celebrate your Indigenous cultures and heritage as our culture and heritage – uniquely Australian.

As Galarrwuy said yesterday as he spoke in Yolngu, he said: "I am speaking in Australian." Sharing, what a generosity, what a love, what a bigness he showed there as he does throughout his life and his leadership.

I want to pay tribute to the work of so many of you here today, who are leading the healing in communities, building bridges between the old and new, and looking for ways to ensure families and communities are not just surviving, but thriving.

Particularly the Indigenous leaders who every day wear many hats, walk in both worlds, and yet give tirelessly for their families and their communities. You often carry a very heavy load, and we thank you.

Where western astronomers look up at the sky and look for the light, Yolngu astronomers look also deep into the dark, using the black space to uncover further information, to unravel further mysteries.

So while we are both looking at the night sky, we are often looking at different parts. And yet through mutual respect, sharing of knowledge and an openness to learning, together we can see and appreciate the whole sky.

Those same principles are guiding us toward Constitutional Recognition.

The final Referendum Council report was delivered, as you know, on the 30th of June. Bill Shorten and I were briefed by the Referendum Council two weeks ago. The report was a long time coming and I know some would like an instant fulfillment of its recommendations.

Let me say, I respect deeply the work of the Referendum Council and all of those who contributed to it, and I respect it by considering it very carefully and the Government is doing so, in the first instance with my colleagues, including Ken Wyatt the first Indigenous Australian to be a Federal Minister, and together we consider it with our Cabinet. That is our way, that is our process, that is how we give respect to serious recommendations on serious matters.

And I do look forward to working closely and in a bipartisan way with the Opposition as we have done to date.

Djapiri said Bill and I are in the same canoe and on this issue we certainly are – but we are not alone, we are not alone in the canoe. We are in the same canoe with all of you as well and we need to steer it wisely to achieve our goal, to achieve that goal of Makarrata. Thank you again Galarrwuy for that word.

We share a sense of the significance of words. I love words and language. There is a great definition. What is the difference between poetry and prose? The best definition of poetry that I have ever found is that which cannot be translated, it can only be felt.

The Referendum Council's report as Marcia reminded us is the fourth major report since that time and it adds immensely to the depth of knowledge. It gave us the Uluru Statement from the Heart, and I congratulate all those who attended on reaching an agreement. That was no small task.

It tells us that the priority for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is to resolve the powerlessness and lack of self-determination experienced – not by all, but certainly by too many.

I have been discussing it with leaders, the leaders of our First Australians and will continue to do so as we develop the next steps.

But there are still many questions:

What would the practical expression of the voice look like? What would the voice look like here for the Yolngu people? What would it look like for the people of Western Sydney, who are the largest population of Aboriginal peoples in Australia?

Is our highest aspiration to have Indigenous people outside the Parliament, providing advice to the Parliament? Or is it to have as many Indigenous voices, elected, within our Parliament?

What impact would the voice have on issues like child protection and justice, where the legislation and responsibility largely rest with state and territory governments?

These are important questions that require careful consideration. But the answers are not beyond us.

And I acknowledge that Indigenous Australians want deeper engagement with government and their fellow Australians, and to be much better consulted, and represented in the political, social and economic life of this nation.

We can't be weighed down by the past, but we can learn from it.

Australians are constitutionally conservative. The bar is surmountable, you can get over it but it is a high bar. That's why the Constitution has often been described as a frozen document.

Now many people talk about referendums, very few have experienced leading a campaign. The 1999 campaign for a Republic – believe me, now, one of the few subjects on which I have special knowledge – the 1999 campaign for a Republic has given me a very keen insight into what it will take to win, how hard it is to win, how much harder is the road for the advocate for change than that of those who resist change. I offer this experience today in the hope that together, we can achieve a different outcome to 1999. A successful referendum.

Compulsory voting has many benefits, but one negative aspect is that those who for one reason or another are not interested in an issue or familiar with it, are much more likely to vote no – it reinforces an already conservative constitutional context.

Another critical difference today is the rise of social media, which has changed the nature of media dramatically, in a decade or two we have a media environment which is no longer curated by editors and producers – but freewheeling, viral and unconstrained.

The question posed in a referendum must have minimal opposition and be clearly understood.

A vital ingredient of success is popular ownership. After all, the Constitution does not belong to the Government, or the Parliament, or the Judges. It belongs to the people.

It is Parliament's duty to propose changes to the Constitution but the Constitution cannot be changed by Parliament. Only the Australian people can do that.

No political deal, no cross party compromise, no leaders' handshake can deliver constitutional change.

Bipartisanship is a necessary but far from a sufficient condition of successful constitutional reform.

To date, again as Marcia described much of the discussion has been about removing the racially discriminatory provisions in the Constitution and recognising our First Australians in our nation's founding document.

However, the Referendum Council has told us that a voice to Parliament is the only option they advise us to put to the Australian people. We have heard this, and we will work with you to find a way forward.

Though not a new concept, the voice is relatively new to the national conversation about constitutional change.

To win, we must all work together to build a high level of interest and familiarity with the concept of a voice, and how this would be different, or the same, as iterations of the past like the National Aboriginal Conference or the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission.

We also need to look to the experience of other countries, as we seek to

develop the best model for Australia.

The historic 1967 Referendum was the most successful in our history because of its simplicity and clarity. The injustices were clearly laid out – Indigenous people were not enjoying the rights and freedoms of other citizens. The question was clearly understood – that the Commonwealth needed to have powers to make laws for Indigenous Australians. And the answer seemed obvious – vote yes to ensure the Commonwealth gave Indigenous people equal rights.

To succeed this time around, we need to develop enough detail so that the problem, the solution and therefore the question at the ballot box are simple, easily understood and overwhelmingly embraced.

One of the toughest lessons I learnt from the Referendum campaign of '99 was that an 'all or nothing' approach sometimes results in nothing. During the campaign, those who disagreed with the model that was proposed urged a "no" vote, arguing that we could all vote for a different Republic model in a few years. I warned that a "no" vote meant no republic for a very long time.

Now, regrettably, my prediction 18 years ago was correct. We must avoid a rejection at a referendum if we want to avoid setting Makarrata reconciliation back.

We recognise that the Uluru statement is powerful because it comes from an Indigenous-designed and led process. And because it comes from the heart, we must accept that it is grounded in wisdom and truth.

It is both a lament and a yearning. It is poetry.

The challenge now is to turn this poetry that speaks so eloquently of your aspiration into prose that will enable its realisation and be embraced by all Australians.

This is hard and complex work. And we need to take care of each other as we continue on this journey. We need to take care of each other in the canoe, lest we tip out of it.

Yesterday afternoon was a powerful show of humanity. As we stood together holding hands – Indigenous and non-Indigenous people – we stood together as Australians. As equals.

And we will have the best chance of success by working together. This cannot be a take it or leave it proposal. We have to come to the table and negotiate in good faith, and I am committed to working with you to find a way forward.

Galarrwuy – you gave us your fire words yesterday, thank you again. We will draw on them as we look to light the path forward for our nation.

And when considering how to do that, we are inspired by the success of the Uluru process. The statement that emerged from Uluru was designed and led by Indigenous Australians and the next steps should be too.



To go to a referendum there must be an understanding between all parties that the proposal will meet the expectations of the very people it claims it will represent.

Now we have five Aboriginal members of our Parliament. They will be vital in shaping and shepherding any legislation through the Parliament. They too are bridge builders, walking in both worlds, and their contribution to the Parliament enriches us all.

The Australian Parliament and the nation's people – Indigenous and non-Indigenous – must be engaged as we work together to find the maximum possible overlap between what Indigenous people are seeking, what the Australian community overall will embrace and what the Parliament will authorise.

I have been learning that the word Makarrata means the 'coming together after a struggle' – Galarrwuy told us a beautiful story this morning about a Makarrata here in this country. And a Makarrata is seen as necessary, naturally, if we are to continue our path to reconciliation.

But just like the night sky, reconciliation means different things to different people. This complexity convinces me that our nation cannot be reconciled in one step, in one great leap. We will only be reconciled when we take a number of actions, both practical and symbolic.

Beyond Constitutional Recognition, that work continues every day. I reflect on the Makarrata discussion of the late 70's and 80's. A list of demands was sent to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs in 1981. It called for rights to land and resources, compensation, the creation of Aboriginal schools, medical centres and an Aboriginal bank.

Despite a final agreement not being reached at the time, we have achieved some of the policies called for. The Commonwealth provided \$433 million to 137 Aboriginal Medical Services across the country last financial year. Indigenous Business Australia provides low interest loans to help Indigenous Australians secure economic opportunities including home ownership with 544 new housing loans made last year. The Aboriginal Benefits Account supports Northern Territory Land Councils and provides grants for the benefit of Aboriginal people living in the Territory.

We now spend \$4.9 billion on the Indigenous Advancement Strategy.

And we are empowering communities through our Indigenous Procurement policy.

I am pleased to announce today the Commonwealth has officially surpassed half a billion dollars in spending with Indigenous businesses all over Australia. I am looking forward to sharing the full two-year results in October. This is a spectacular increase from just \$6.2 million being won by Indigenous businesses only a few years ago under former policies.

Since 2008 the Commonwealth has been helping improve remote housing and bring down rates of overcrowding, with \$5.4 billion to build thousands of better homes over ten years.

And the land is returning to its traditional owners.

More than 2.5 million square kilometres of land, or about 34 per cent of Australia's land mass is today recognised under Native Title. Another 24 per cent is covered by registered claims and by 2025, our ambition is to finalise all current Native Title claims.

So we are standing here on Aboriginal land – land that has been rightfully acknowledged as yours and returned to you. And we are standing here near the birthplace of the land rights movement. A movement of which the Yolngu people were at the forefront.

As a nation we've come a long way.

In the Northern Territory, more than 50 per cent of the land is now Aboriginal land, recognised as Aboriginal land.

Just like the land at Kenbi which, on behalf of our nation, I returned to the traditional owners, the Larrakia people last year.

Earlier this year I appointed June Oscar AO, who has been acknowledged earlier, as the first female Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, who has agreed to report on the issues affecting Indigenous women and girls' success and safety.

And all of that work contributes to a better future for our First Australians.

But there is much more to be done in not just what we do, but how we do it – as we work with our First Australians. We are doing things with our First Australians, not to them.

Now Galarrwuy – I have read and read again your essay Rom Watungu. It too is a story from the heart, of your father, of his life and when his time came, how he handed his authority to you, the embodiment of continuity, the bearer of a name that means "the rock that stands against time"

But rocks that stand against time, ancient cultures and lore, these are the strong foundations on which new achievements are built, from which new horizons can be seen – the tallest towers are built on the oldest rocks.

You, Galarrwuy, ask Australians to let Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders breathe and be free, be who you are and ask that we see your songs and languages, the land and the ceremonies as a gift.

As Prime Minister I will continue to do all I can to ensure that being an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian means to be successful, to achieve, to have big dreams and high hopes, and to draw strength from your identity as an Indigenous person in this great country.

That's why, as we renegotiate the Closing the Gap targets with the various state and territory jurisdictions later this year, my Government has insisted on a strengths based approach. Indigenous people are not a problem to be

solved. You are our fellow Australians. Your cultures are a gift to our nation.

There's so much more work to be done.

But in doing so, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and all Australians, continue to connect with pride and optimism – with mabu liyan, in Pat's language from the Yawuru people – the wellbeing that comes with a reconciled harmony with you, our First Australians, our shared history truthfully told and a deeper understanding of the most ancient human cultures on earth, and the First Australians to whom we have so much to thank for sharing them with us.

Thank you so much.