

Warren Mundine



Ten myths upon which the Voice is badly based

Australians will soon vote on a constitutionally enshrined Indigenous "Voice". Some arguments for the Voice are built on myths. Here are ten.

1. Aboriginal people asked for the Voice in the Uluru Statement

The Uluru Statement was adopted at a convention at a Yulara resort, 25km from Uluru. I and others have spoken to Anangu elders angry it was named for their country, because it's not their culture.

The convention was attended by 250 delegates, hand-picked from about a dozen community Dialogues (at which attendance was capped at 100, with 60 reserved for First Nations groups – and invitations-only aimed to ensure consensus).

And, still, a minority of convention delegates rejected it and walked out. Hardly groundswell support.

2. Aboriginal people aren't in the constitution

Aboriginal people are in the constitution, as are all Australians. We have been since the 1967 Referendum, when Australians voted for all Australians to be treated equally, removing express exclusions of Aboriginals in the constitution and dismantling state-based segregation regimes and their bureaucracies controlling Aboriginal lives.

The Voice will be about Indigenous Australians alone, effectively reversing the 1967 Referendum to constitutionally enshrine a vast Indigenous bureaucracy to speak to everyone about everything.

3. Other countries have Indigenous constitutional recognition and it's fine

The US constitution gives Congress power to "regulate commerce with the Indian tribes". Canada's constitution recognises existing aboriginal and treaty rights. Nothing like the Voice.

New Zealand's constitution comprises various precedents and principles, including the Principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. In the 1970s, the Waitangi Tribunal was set up to investigate Maori grievances. In time, courts ruled the government must redress any grievances the Tribunal identifies as legitimate.

It now intervenes on all manner of subjects, including prioritising Covid vaccines for Maori over elderly non-Maori and recidivism targets that have seen violent convicted criminals escaping jail.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese says look to New Zealand on how the Voice will work. I have and I don't like what I see.

4. The Voice will be only advisory, courts won't give it power

The Voice will have a constitutional right to advise every minister, public servant and agency



Senator Jacinta Nampijinpa Price overlooking Alice Springs. Picture Mark Brake

on everything from submarines to tax to interest rates to climate policy to parking tickets.

Consultation rights are coercive because decisions can be litigated on the grounds of the processes followed and/or information considered.

Constitutional Expert Group member Professor Greg Craven says Albanese's Voice "absolutely guarantees judicial intervention".

NZ courts transformed the Waitangi Tribunal from merely advisory to dictating government decisions. I believe it's only a matter of time before the Voice even runs roughshod over traditional owner autonomy over their own lands.

5. Aboriginals don't have a voice

Albanese's Voice will be the fifth attempt at a national, representative Indigenous body in 50 years, on top of the many bodies advising governments past and present.

Nothing happens on Aboriginal lands without consulting and negotiating with traditional owners through native title and land rights

legislation. We have more Aboriginal parliamentarians than ever, above parity.

I'm always tripping over blackfellas in Canberra talking to politicians, public servants and political staffers.

There's no door that isn't wide open to Aboriginal people who want to be heard.

6. The Voice will speak for Aboriginals

The Voice's members won't be elected. Direct elections were rejected in the Co-Design Report.

Members will be determined collectively by community organisations. A small minority of Aboriginals join community organisations. The Voice won't represent most Aboriginals or any first nation.

7. The Voice would have prevented the problems in Alice Springs

Voice campaigner Shireen Morris claimed in a panel discussion with me that the Voice could have stopped Albanese removing alcohol bans and cashless welfare in Alice Springs when Aboriginal MPs failed to do so.

Yet all Aboriginal parliamentarians who voted to remove these restrictions, including Linda Burney, Malarndirri McCarthy and Pat Dodson, also support the Voice.

The removal was also supported by Pat Turner who heads the Coalition of the Peaks, the government's principal Indigenous advisory body. People can make bad decisions, whether members of parliament or of an unelected Voice.

8. A No vote will damage Australia's reputation

To the rest of the world, the Voice is a TV show. Foreign media barely covers Australia's constitutional Voice. Google Trends searches show zero interest outside Australia.

UN wokerati may scold Australia for voting No. So what? No other country has a constitutionally enshrined Indigenous voice. Who are they to insist we do?

9. Opponents of the Voice are racist

I'm Aboriginal and have campaigned for Aboriginal rights all my life. I oppose the Voice. Am I racist?

Jacinta Nampijinpa Price opposes the Voice. She's Warlpiri, advocates for Aboriginal women and children, and once jointly presented at the National Press Club with Marcia Langton, a leading Yes campaigner. Does Ms Langton usually share a stage with racists?

Recently, Jacinta and I brought a 20-strong delegation of Aboriginal opponents of the Voice to Canberra (whom Albanese shunned and most media ignored). Are they all racist too?

Of course not. It's not racist to oppose special rights that will up-end our democratic system.

10. The Voice will close the gap

Economic participation is the only way to close the gap: kids going to school, adults working in real jobs, social stability in communities so people want to live, work and invest there. The Voice won't do this. It will smother the neediest Aboriginals with more bureaucracy, tie up community organisations doing good work and divert funding from real outcomes.

It will likely make the gap wider. **Nyunggal Warren Mundine is the director, Indigenous Forum at the Centre for Independent Studies and president of Recognise a Better Way.**

JOE HILDEBRAND P19

Golden housing opportunities sadly lost in Waterloo

Trina Jones



The Waterloo estate, built on public land, is the largest social housing estate in Sydney.

It's a diverse and connected community where people look after their neighbours – a necessity given so many people live in poverty and with poor health.

Many people on the estate experienced homelessness before getting their place in social housing.

There are more than 50,000 other people on the waiting list for social housing and for those not deemed a priority case they will still be waiting for housing in 2032.

So when the government trumpeted the redevelopment of the largest social housing estate in Sydney, those of us in the homelessness sector saw a rare opportunity for desperate people.

The reality is much different.

The Waterloo south redevelopment announcement emphasised "new social and affordable housing, as well as private homes and new public space".

Let's look at the numbers. The total number of new social

housing units is just 100, compared to 2150 new homes that will be sold to private buyers and investors.

When it comes to "affordable housing", the category that promises nurses and fireys and other essential workers affordable rents in their communities, 227 homes are promised – or 7.5 per cent of the total.

At a time when the demand for social and affordable housing has never been greater, the Waterloo redevelopment will prioritise the building of 88 per cent private new dwellings on public land.

It is welcome that the current 747 social housing units at Waterloo are being replaced with a promise that the 2000-odd tenants can return after

construction in 2024, but the displacement is still going to be a challenge for many in this tight-knit community.

The Waterloo redevelopment is a lost opportunity that will provide limited community benefit.

Both side of politics must never allow this to happen again.

The vision set by Rob Stokes during his time as minister for infrastructure and cities called for a minimum 30 per cent social and affordable housing on public land as critical to the success of society and the economy.

The redevelopment of Waterloo, as a significant and historic part of Sydney's social housing fabric, was an opportunity to reach higher and

provide 50 per cent social and affordable housing just as they do in other global cities that invest public money into assets on public land.

The first stage of Waterloo is a \$3bn investment.

The state government should use the substantial tax revenue from it to start addressing the social housing waiting list and building 5000 new social housing dwellings, in co-operation with the federal government.

Let's hear everyone's voices and maybe we will get a fairer mix next time an opportunity like Waterloo comes up.

Trina Jones is CEO of Homelessness NSW