



Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples



Interim Report

Response of First Nations Media
Australia

September 2018



This submission is made by First Nations Media Australia. It is expected that some members may make individual submissions in which case the First Nations Media Australia submission should not be taken to displace those submissions.

About First Nations Media Australia

First Nations Media Australia is the peak body for Indigenous media and communications. It was founded in 2001 as the peak body for remote Indigenous media and communications. In late 2016 it transitioned to the national peak body for First Nations broadcasting, media and communications.

Up to 105 Remote Indigenous Broadcasting Services (RIBS), 33 additional licensed retransmission sites across Australia, 8 Remote Indigenous Media Organisations (RIMOs) and 28 urban and regional First Nations radio services are eligible for representation by First Nations Media Australia.

About the First Nations broadcasting and media sector

First Nations broadcasters are not-for-profit community organisations providing a primary and essential service to their communities. They reach nearly 50% of the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, but are prevented from providing a primary radio service to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples due to a lack of funding.

First Nations broadcasters and media producers also connect non-Indigenous communities with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and culture, developing greater understanding and building stronger relationships.

The sector comprises:

- Radio services able to reach around 320,000 First Nations people, including around 100,000 very hard to reach people in remote Indigenous communities, or approximately 47% of the First Nations population.
- A wide range of First Nations news and current affairs services including:
 - National Indigenous Radio Service (NIRS) and its National Indigenous News and Weekly News-in-Review

- Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association's news service, including its Strong Voices program
 - Koori Radio's news and current affairs programming
 - NITV News and Living Black
 - Print media including Koori Mail, National Indigenous Times, Land Rights News
- A regional satellite TV service reaching 240,000 remote households and a free to air national TV service.
 - Over 230 radio broadcast sites coordinated by 35 licensed, community-owned, not-for-profit organisations.
 - A strong web presence with First Nations broadcasters active on social media. Plus indigiTUBE, a dedicated online platform showcasing aggregated content complimented by an app, each of which streams 18 radio services.

The First Nations broadcasting sector delivers programming in over 20 languages national, including the first language of many people in remote communities. In the remote context, it is the most reliable and ubiquitous radio and media service available to audiences. The sector is based in local communities and employs local people as broadcasters and media producers. It is a local and trusted voice as evidenced in the 2017 Social Return on Investment analysis of First Nations broadcasters.¹ The sector reaches significant audience share with 80% of people in remote Indigenous communities being regular listeners to radio services.²

Summary of First Nations broadcasting and media sector scope:

- **Radio:** Live shows, plus interviews, radio documentaries, news, emergency information, community events, government and other messaging within community broadcasting guidelines.
- **Video & film production:** Production of culture and language based content for broadcast & online distribution.
- **TV:** National (NITV) and regional (ICTV) TV services; local TV services (Goolarri TV at Broome, Larrakia TV at Darwin).
- **News production:** National, regional and local news and current affairs services for broadcast, as well as print and online news media.

¹ <https://www.firstnationsmedia.org.au/about/social-value-study-2017>

² <https://www.firstnationsmedia.org.au/projects/indigenous-communications-and-media-survey-2016>

In this Response



1. INTRODUCTION	5
2. CONTRIBUTION TO TRUTH-TELLING PROCESSES	6
3. CONTRIBUTION TO PUBLIC DISCUSSION AND CONSULTATION PROCESSES	7
4. RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION QUESTIONS	9
4.1 What mechanisms can be used to promote the active participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the voice at the national level?	9
4.2 What mechanisms can be used to promote the active participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the voice at the local/regional level?	10
5. APPENDIX A – First Nations Broadcasting Sector Capacity Statement	



1. Introduction

The recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within Australia's Constitution and/or with the Parliamentary structure is a contentious issue. First Nations Media Australia acknowledges the diverse and passionate views summarized in the Committee's *Interim Report* and within our own membership and media sector. This submission does not represent a view on the structure or implementation of The Voice or the voices as no sector-wide position has been established. Rather, this submission seeks to describe the contribution First Nations media organisations can make to the truth-telling process and to the discussion of various representative models. It also provides information about the mechanisms available through the First Nations media sector to address some of the concerns and issues described in submissions to the Committee, as outlined in the *Interim Report, July 2018*.

Indigenous broadcast licenses are issued by the ACMA under the community media license type. Community broadcasters are united by six guiding principles, including working to:

- Promote harmony and diversity and contribute to an inclusive, cohesive and culturally-diverse Australian community, and
- Pursue the principles of democracy, access and equity, especially for people and issues not adequately represented in other media.³

First Nations broadcasters make an important contribution to Australian democracy. Through supporting its principles (as described above) our sector empowers audiences to understand political issues and systems and to actively engage in Australia's democratic functions. Contributions to truth-telling processes, to consultation processes and to promoting active participation in The Voice and/or the voices are underpinned by these principles and by the desire to have First Nations views represented in our national dialogue through media.

³ Community Broadcasting Codes of Practice, <https://www.cbaa.org.au/resource/codes-practice-introduction>



2. Contribution to Truth-telling Processes

For almost 40 years First Nations media practitioners have been acting to address the failures of mainstream media to accurately portray Australia's history and represent the views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. During that time, First Nations media organisations have been established across the country to provide a platform for sharing the voices, stories, languages, cultural knowledge and relevant information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

First Nations media practitioners have also been collecting recordings that tell the story of the impact of colonization in a collective way, through documenting of significant events and sharing of individual stories. Many of those recordings have been broadcast and/or archived. First Nations Media Australia is currently seeking to ensure those significant archived materials are preserved for future generations and to contribute to the ongoing truth-telling process.

The significance of these historical recordings to the truth-telling process is that the content has been collected by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples working in community-controlled organisations. Recordings from this perspective are collected and distributed in a manner that is culturally sensitive and alive to the impact of colonisation within communities. We offer a unique opportunity to contribute first-hand responses to political and social events from a First Nations perspective in truth-telling about our shared history, its impacts on Indigenous history and the contribution First Nations peoples have made to protecting and building Australia.

First Nations media organisations continue this role in a contemporary setting through addressing stereotypes in mainstream culture, through strengthening culture within communities and through sharing responses to current events from the perspective of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In this way, we are actively participating in the truth-telling process every day and through our work,

empowering local voices to share their own experiences, challenges, strengths and truths.

With regards to the contribution the First Nations media sector can make to the truth-telling process as it relates to the Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; our sector can provide professionally trained media producers, interviewers and recording and production services to document truth-telling and consultation processes. We hold a range of evidence that could contribute to acknowledgement and acceptance of the facts of Australia's history.

First Nations media can address some of the concerns expressed in comments from *Nyamba Buru Yawuru* and the University of New South Wales about the need for truth-telling to take place in a localized setting. Our sector is locally relevant with radio services in over 230 locations. We can document and contribute to truth-telling processes on a national level, or at a local level as required.



3. Contribution to Public Discussion and Consultation Processes

First Nations media is an essential service, particularly in remote Australia. First Nations media practitioners are professionally trained to act as a key conduit for information relevant to communities across the country. The capacity within the First Nations media sector to report on complex information in a manner appropriate to the needs of their local audience, and in many cases to translate information into appropriate language. This approach addresses concerns expressed by the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples in the *Interim Report* about a 'one-size-fits-all' approach (2.25). Rather, First Nations media organisations can help facilitate dialogue that is locally relevant. And they have the capacity to do so over a period of time, addressing concerns expressed by the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Cultural Centre about pressures on Aboriginal

and Torres Strait Islander people to offer solutions to complex issues at a single public meeting (2.24).

First Nations media resonates with audiences as means of two-way dialogue, with some listeners describing talkback programming as a public meeting in the community through directly participation in radio broadcasts.⁴ First Nations Media encourages the Committee to engage with First Nations broadcasters as a means of creating additional space for dialogue around and outside of more formalised consultation processes. This can happen through the provision of information in news and talk-related programming, through interviews with Committee members and stakeholders and through the dissemination of information through social media channels. In this way, First Nations media can support the process of engaging with a range of ideas around Constitutional Recognition and encourage community participation in consultation meetings and, in future, engagement with The Voice or voices directly.

The *Interim Report* notes that several of the submissions received to date express concern about the language and terminology used to discuss the range of options surrounding Constitutional Recognition. First Nations Media Australia reminds the Committee of the role First Nations broadcasters play in relaying complex information to communities in an accessible format through explaining technical terminology, providing relevant context and in some cases, translating language.

The First Nations media sector successfully undertakes this role in making complex national and international news relevant to local communities and promoting health campaigns. This is one of many reasons that First Nations broadcasters are a trusted voice in the media landscape. In this way, First Nations media organisations can contribute to the broader understanding of the models being considered and the differences between them amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences.

⁴ Forde, S, Meadows, M, Ewart J, & Foxwell, K, *Community Media Matters*, Griffith University Press, Canberra, 2007, page 56

First Nations media practitioners are themselves active spokespeople in their communities. The nature of their work fosters ongoing relationships with a broad range of community organisations and stakeholders, alongside direct audience engagement. Broadcasters are trained to use their networks to draw on expert advice for any given topic. As implementation of The Voice and/or voices progresses, First Nations media practitioners could be useful in encouraging engagement with election processes or other means of determining representation within The Voice structure.



4. Responses to Consultation Questions:

4.1 What mechanisms can be used to promote the active participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the voice at the national level?

First Nations Media Australia encourages the Committee to engage with the following media services at a national level to encourage active participation in the voice:

- NITV – dedicated Indigenous television services broadcast nationally via SBS.
- ICTV – satellite television service covering 240,000 households in remote Australia.
- National Indigenous Radio Service (NIRS) – produces hourly news updates, re-broadcast on First Nations services across the country.
- Koori Mail – nationally distributed print newspaper.
- IndigenousX – online news service.

4.2 What mechanisms can be used to promote the active participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the voice at the local/regional level?

First Nations Media Australia encourages the Committee to engage with the 35 licensed radio organisations (see <https://firstnationsmedia.org.au/our-industry/radio-services>) that service 230 urban, regional and remote broadcast sites across Australia. This may take the form of:

- promotional campaigns to encourage participation in formalized consultation and elective processes,
- production of locally targeted messaging;
- interviews with Committee members and relevant stakeholders,
- distribution of information through regular programming and news updates,
- sharing of information via social media channels, and/or
- other mechanisms as offered by regional media practitioners.

The Committee is reminded that First Nations media organisations are autonomous and authentic and may offer differing levels of support as appropriate to their local environment.



Contact Details

Daniel Featherstone
General Manager
Level 2/70 Elder Street, Alice Springs NT 0870
PO Box 2731. Alice Springs NT 0871
Ph 08 8952 6465
F 08 8992 9669
E manager@firstnationsmedia.org.au
W www.firstnationsmedia.org.au