

'Union mob' speaks up for First Nations voice

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As the deadline looms for [submissions to the Government's proposed framework for a First Nations voice](#), Federation joined Indigenous unionists from around the country in Canberra for one of the largest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander delegations to Parliament House.

The "union mob", led by advocate for the Uluru Statement and union leader Thomas Mayor, met with Minister for Indigenous Australians Ken Wyatt on 16 March to pressure him for a referendum on a Voice to Parliament.

Relieving Aboriginal Education Coordinator at Federation Russell Honnery said it was great to be a part of the Unions Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander delegation to Parliament.

"It is extremely important that we have the First Nations peoples voice enshrined in the Australian Constitution," he said. "There have been many times we have had a voice, but when a government does not agree with our voice it has been dismantled.

"The media release [from the delegation] was well received by the public and has made the Government nervous. We need to push harder and get behind the voice, please go online and put your submission in."



Federation encourages members to make a submission to the Government's Indigenous Voice Co-Design Process. A number of websites provide guidance; the [From The Heart site](#) includes a simple step-by-step guide.

Federation and the union movement has a long and proud history of standing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in campaigning for social justice, civil and industrial rights in the pursuit of equality and self-determination.

The delegation also met with Labor Caucus, and "made it clear that as Indigenous unionists, we understand the importance of a strong united voice to both use the truth as leverage, and to negotiate meaningful treaties," Mr Mayor said.

"Lastly, we visited the Tent Embassy, where we learnt that it's time to bring our voices in to the centre of decision making, where we have a rightful place to be heard," he wrote on Facebook.

Mr Mayor later told the ABC: "A voice cannot only be legislated, it must be protected in the constitution because every other voice we've had in the past has been destroyed by hostile governments.

"It's a disgrace they [the government] have opposed truth telling and the talks about treaty, and if we had a

voice we think that would make it much harder for them to say no to things that are so obvious that this nation should achieve."

With just over a week until public submissions close, Labor and unions have also renewed calls for a constitutionally enshrined voice.

In a statement, Minister for Indigenous Australians Ken Wyatt said the government would consider all legal options for the form of the voice after the co-design process had finished.

"We are now in the second stage of the Indigenous voice co-design process, inviting all Australians to provide their feedback and comments on Indigenous voice proposals," Mr Wyatt said.

"The more people that provide their feedback, the greater chance we have to refine the best possible options and set up structures that are successful in the long term."

The Uluru Statement from the Heart was released on 26 May 2017 by delegates to the First Nations National Constitutional Convention, held over four days near Uluru in Central Australia.

The statement was issued after the Convention, and calls for a "First Nations Voice" in the Australian Constitution and a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of "agreement-making" and truth-telling between the Australian Government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.