

News Release

Khatija Thomas
Commissioner for Aboriginal Engagement

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Commissioner for Aboriginal Engagement welcomes Expert Panel Report

Commissioner for Aboriginal Engagement, Khatija Thomas, welcomes the Expert Panels report on Constitutional Reform.

“It’s a positive step in the right direction towards reconciliation, recognition and respect for the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people,” said Commissioner Thomas.

The Expert Panel was appointed by the Prime Minister to consult with the community and report to Government on options for the constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Commissioner Thomas was pleased to be part of the Expert Panel’s consultation process by taking part in Anglicare SA’s Aboriginal Community Seminar on constitutional recognition for Aboriginal people last year. Recommendations from the Seminar formed part of a submission that was handed to the Expert Panel.

“I encourage all Australians to support the reform and look forward to engaging in constructive dialogue as we move towards establishing a referendum,” said Commissioner Thomas.

The Commissioner would also like South Australians to remember that our State Constitution is in need of reform to reflect a contemporary South Australia and to be a place for all Aboriginal people in this state.

At the state level the Constitution can be changed through an act of Parliament.

“With such a simple process for amendments to occur it makes sense that at the state levels we act now and ensure we are recognising our Aboriginal people. Changes like this will not bring about overnight change to social and economic conditions that Aboriginal people experience. What it will provide is a new dynamic and refreshed relationship between governments and Aboriginal people to negotiate our shared futures,” said Commissioner Thomas.

“A key part of change and recognition will be to ensure that it is not tokenistic but meaningful and leads to real outcomes for all of us.”

“I urge you all to support substantive constitutional change in your state as well as joining in the national debate to modernise our national constitution.”

Prior to her appointment as Co-commissioner for Aboriginal Engagement Ms Thomas was a solicitor with the South Australian Native Title Services, working on projects to strengthen Aboriginal community governance, participation in and implementation of native title benefits.

“Ever since I was old enough to understand the lack of recognition of Aboriginal people I have wanted to do whatever I could to change this,” said Ms Thomas.

“To witness the Australian Constitution changed to reflect Australia’s true culture would be a great honour for me.”

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