

Friday, 26 May 2017

## Reconciliation can be advanced by constitutional change

On the eve of National Reconciliation Week, the Law Council of Australia has [released its submission](#) to the Referendum Council's Discussion Paper calling for constitutional change to meet the aspirations and wishes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Law Council of Australia President, Fiona McLeod SC, said that meaningful strides towards true reconciliation should be made, to mark the anniversaries of the 1992 Mabo decision (25 years) and the 1967 Referendum (50 years).

"The Law Council has long held that the Australian Constitution should formally recognise the distinct identities of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and secure them equality before the law," Ms McLeod said.

"The Referendum Council's work in supporting this necessary dialogue has been essential, particularly through the convention at Uluru.

"This is a reform for all Australians, to strengthen the Australian Commonwealth, provide due recognition and respect to the First Australians and bind us all closer in reconciliation."

Ms McLeod said achieving reconciliation should be considered a national priority of the highest order, which runs hand-in-hand with efforts to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

"As we reflect on National Reconciliation Week, there remains a critical need to address the widening justice gap. Indigenous incarceration rates are continuing to rise and all governments share responsibility.

"An intergovernmental strategy, along with justice targets, is long overdue," Ms McLeod said.

This followed the release of a [PwC report](#) showing that annual savings to the economy of nearly \$19 billion could be achieved by 2040 if the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous rates of incarceration were closed.

"The PwC report makes a range of excellent evidence-based recommendations that align with Law Council positions. These include identifying opportunities for Indigenous self-determination, designing better throughcare and reintegration programs to reduce recidivism, improving cultural awareness, investing more in prevention and early intervention, and establishing hard targets to measure national progress," Ms McLeod said.

"These are sensible reforms that could drive real change. We just need the political will to implement them widely."

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