

# 'Controlled by a kindergarten child': Noel Pearson blasts Nationals over Voice opposition

Pearson also accused senator Jacinta Price of being caught in a 'tragic redneck celebrity vortex'.



One of the chief architects of the Uluru Statement from the Heart, Noel Pearson, has savaged a decision by the federal National Party not to support a Voice to Parliament.

Nationals leader David Littleproud made the announcement on Monday, flanked by colleagues and Liberal Northern Territory senator Jacinta Nampijinpa Price, a Warlpiri woman.

Pearson, a Guugu Yimithirr man, said his previous dealings with the junior coalition partner made their latest decision a surprise.

"Of all the political parties the Nationals were the most supportive of the idea of a Voice," Pearson told the ABC's Radio National Breakfast

program.

"This is a complete turnaround for the National Party."

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Given that no referendum in history has been successful without bipartisan support from the mainstream political parties, Pearson was asked whether he thought the decision amounted to a death blow for the Yes campaign.

"There is an overwhelming majority of Australians who are in favour of this Voice, and the National Party is in danger of being left behind in history... After all, it's just a squalid little political party... that is currently controlled by a kindergarten child."

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## **Dissent within the ranks**

Indeed, Mr Pearson's assertion that the Nationals were out of step with popular opinion seemed to be confirmed by members of the party themselves, who broke ranks to declare they were still in favour of legislating a Voice.

Federal frontbencher Andrew Gee has previously stated his support for the proposal, and confirmed on Tuesday afternoon that he had not changed his position.

Meanwhile in Western Australia, the leader of the state branch of the Nationals, Mia Davies, lashed out at her federal counterparts for refusing to back a constitutionally enshrined Voice.

Ms Davies was also critical of an apparent lack of consultation, saying she

and her colleagues had been taken unawares by Mr Littleproud's announcement on Monday.

## 'Tragic redneck celebrity vortex'

Jacinta Price is against legislating a Voice to Parliament. Noel Pearson has accused her of being beholden to lobby groups. Source: AAP / MICK TSIKAS/AAPIMAGE

However while Liberal Party is still yet to declare an official position, Senator Jacinta Price has thrown her enthusiastic support behind the National's position.

Senator Price has been a vocal critic of the Voice. Appearing alongside Mr Littleproud on Monday, she questioned the establishment of a body designed to give advice on matters especially pertinent to First Nations people.

"One of our fundamental principles is that we are all regarded as equal under the law, despite race, despite gender, despite anything else.

"And why should I as an Indigenous Australian be governed under a separate entity than the rest of Australia because of my race?"

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Mr Pearson was dismissive of the senator's position, claiming she is beholden to conservative organisations.

"She is caught in a vortex that reminds me of Pauline Hanson 26 years ago... [it's] a celebrity vortex that's very compelling, that gets her out in front of people and gets a lot of cheers.

"But... ultimately it's a tragic redneck celebrity vortex that she's caught up in, and it involves right wing people, particularly... the Institute of Public Affairs and the Center for Independent Studies.

"They're the string pullers... and their strategy was to find a Blakfulla to punch down on other Blakfullas."

Ms Price rejected the claims.

"I am no stranger to attacks from angry men," she said in a statement.

"While the 'Yes' campaigners have suggested this referendum is all about bringing people together as a unifying exercise for the whole of Australia their actions speak otherwise.

"I am here to contribute to practical and meaningful measures within my capacity as the Senator for the Northern Territory and I will continue to be the voice for the voiceless who expect nothing less of me."

Nationals leader David Littleproud made the announcement alongside Liberal senator Jacinta Price. Source: AAP / Mick Tsikas

## **Littleproud accused of superficial consultation**

Speaking on breakfast television Tuesday morning, Littleproud said his party had consulted "quite widely" with people from both the Yes and No campaigns before reaching their decision.

"[Uluru Statement co-chairs] Professor Megan Davis as well as Pat Anderson were genuine in their consultation, and we're genuine in terms of the intent of what we're trying to achieve," he told the ABC.

However, Pearson said the Nationals leader had engaged in superficial diplomacy.

"He did a quick ring around last week... a tick and flick. He knew he needed to show some semblance of consultation, so he rang Megan Davis and Pat Anderson out of the blue and had a conversation with them.

"If this was just all about giving the appearance of consultation... he's made a choice even before an official government model is tabled in the parliament."

Mr Littleproud and Senator Price have been contacted for comment.

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## **Nationals 'had plenty of time' to Close the Gap**

In making the announcement on Monday, Littleproud justified the decision by arguing a Voice would do little to close the gap.

"We believe [in] empowering local Indigenous communities, giving them the power at a local level, not creating another layer of [bureaucracy] in Canberra..." he told the press.

Kaurareg Kalkalgal Erubamle man Thomas Mayo, a vocal supporter of the Voice, said the claims did not stack up.

"The Nationals had plenty of time to close the gap... They had the power to do a whole lot more, not just federally but in their own electorates, and they've not done it.

"Now all of a sudden, they're going around saying that they think it won't close the gap. It's completely false"