

By voting Yes in voice referendum you will lose nothing | The Australian

[Marcus Stewart](#) 12:00AM March 14, 2023

Voice is the first step towards our shared destination

The upcoming referendum for a First Nations voice to parliament is a test of whether Australia as a nation is mature enough to finally reckon with its past and start to look to a shared future where everyone can feel respected and that they belong.

As a proud Nira illim bulluk man of the Taungurung nation, I want to see the Yes vote get up because I desperately want First Nations peoples to have the ability to shape the policies that affect our communities, our culture and our lands.

For too long Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have had policies made about us or for us, but never by us.

Every aspect of our lives has been controlled at different times since invasion: where we could live, who we could marry, where we could shop, what we could buy. We were forced off our ancestral lands, where we had gathered natural wealth for countless generations. Our children were stolen, our families torn apart.

Everyone knows the stories, our hard truths. But this isn't ancient history, this is living memory. The scars run deep and the flow-on effects of dispossession are still holding our people back.

These were policies made by politicians who didn't understand us and certainly didn't respect us.

Establishing a First Nations voice is about changing that dynamic. It's the

first step to having a meaningful say about the decisions that affect our lives.

That's why I, and the vast majority of our mob, want a voice.

But I also want to see the Yes vote succeed because I know what's on offer to everyone who now calls this beautiful place home.

Voice, and later treaty and truth, will provide many opportunities for everyone to deepen their understanding and appreciation of this beautiful country and of the oldest living culture on the planet.

Who reading this has ever stood in the bush and paused to breathe in the smell of eucalyptus or gazed out at the endless desert horizons and not felt a profound sense of gratitude for being here on this land?

First Nations people have a unique connection to this country and our care and knowledge of it run deep. The voice is about having a taste of that inserted into the heart of Australia's democratic system. By voting Yes you will lose absolutely nothing, but everyone stands to gain so much.

We all came to this place called home from different paths, whether we were born here or drawn here. This is where we find ourselves together now.

We need to reconcile our relationships at a structural level, but these issues are also personal for all of us.

Look at me. Look at my skin. Every day, whether it's heckling on social media or barbs from some privileged right-wing media commentator, I have people saying to me "you're not Aboriginal, you're white". They can't seem to get their head around the notion that some Aboriginal people have fair skin, but this is what the impact of colonisation looks like.

I am the embodiment of a history that complicates our relationship with the place we call home.

For whatever reason, I find myself here, today, calling Australia home and

hoping to pass down a better future for my kids.

I know many allies are reflective enough to also consider their relationship with their home. Most love it here, but many ask themselves if they can ever truly belong.

At a personal level, what do they need to do to be reconciled?

I don't have all the answers, but I know if people are asking these questions, it is a good sign.

There is no magic wand, no flick of a switch. But it is clear that we are on a journey together and a Yes vote for the voice will be the stepping stone that takes us closer to our shared destination.

There's a lot at stake for First Nations peoples, but our success will not come at anyone's expense. Voice, treaty and truth are all steps that will benefit the soul of the nation.

These discussions aren't about assigning blame and guilt, they're about understanding what caused and what perpetuates the problems and committing to fixing them.

A First Nations voice offers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples a chance to have a say when it comes to our own lives, but it's also an opportunity for everyone in Australia to hear us – to learn more about us, deepen understanding and connect to this place we all call home.

We want to share our culture and have everyone able to celebrate it.

All that we ask in return is for the freedom and power to make the decisions that affect our communities, our cultures and our lands.

Marcus Stewart is a member of the Referendum Working Group.

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