



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Bishops say issues around Voice are moral, not just political

MEDIA RELEASE

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Australia's Catholic bishops say the issues surrounding the proposed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice "are not just political", but are also "moral and ethical", in a statement ahead of next month's referendum.

In *Towards the Referendum*, the bishops encourage all Australians to educate themselves, including by reading the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* and the bishops' annual Social Justice Statement. They also invite people to listen to others' hopes and fears.

As with statements the bishops made earlier this year, there is no advice on whether people should vote Yes or No on the referendum. The bishops instead call for people to consider and seek to understand the country's past, present and future.

"We need to see the truth of what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have suffered and the disadvantage many experience to this day. Justice demands that we seek to rectify this disadvantage," the bishops write.

"We urge all Australians to listen to the hopes and fears of each other. We urge people to act in a way that commits to redressing the disadvantage suffered by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and will allow them to reach their potential, thus promoting reconciliation for the good not just of some, but of the whole nation."

The statement contains comments from Australia's first bishop, John Bede Polding, on the harsh mistreatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the 1840s. It also draws on statements from Pope St John Paul II in Alice Springs in 1986, and Pope Francis more recently.

The bishops conclude the statement by imploring the Holy Spirit, "who opens locked doors", to "give us light and strength to keep working for a better and more equitable Australia".

[Click here to read *Towards the Referendum*.](#)

In May, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference issued a statement on the Voice, calling for the debate to be conducted civilly and respectfully. They acknowledged that Australians have differing views on the referendum and the expected outcomes were it to succeed.

The bishops' 2023-24 Social Justice Statement, published in August, called for a "new engagement" with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, "an engagement which involves a commitment to listen to our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sisters and brothers and to learn from them".

"This listening and learning and the actions which flow from them must be grounded in a spirit of love if there is to be a change for the better," the statement said.

At the statement's launch, Bishops Commission for Social Justice, Mission and Service chair Bishop Vincent Long OFMConv said people need to listen to First Nations people "with deep respect and learn from them about what needs to be done to improve their situations".

"We need to walk with them, day by day, and work with them to bring about change for the better – for their people and for all of us," he said.

"Strengthening our relationship with our First Peoples is integral and indeed critical to the strengthening of the whole nation."

[Click here to read the bishops' Social Justice Statement.](#)