

# Indigenous Australians want treaty, not constitutional recognition, says elder

The winner of the Naidoc week lifetime achievement award, Tauto Sansbury, says 60% to 70% of Aboriginal people do not support the Recognise campaign



A group of protesters outside a Sydney meeting between Indigenous leaders and politicians discussing constitutional recognition, in Kirribilli, Sydney, on Monday. Photograph: David Moir/AAP

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A majority of Aboriginal people would prefer a treaty with the Australian government rather than constitutional recognition, according to an Aboriginal elder whose advocacy has been recognised during Naidoc week.

Tauto Sansbury, a veteran South Australian campaigner, said Aboriginal leaders who met with Tony Abbott and [Bill Shorten](#) last week were “parroting” a political push for constitutional recognition rather than listening to a community desire for a formal treaty.

“There are a lot of Aboriginal people who don’t support constitutional change, a hell of a lot,” Sansbury told Guardian Australia. “The percentage is far more than the Recognise campaign is saying. I’d say 60% to 70% of Aboriginal people are interested in treaties rather than constitutional change.

“This is our country, we should be talking about a treaty between the Aboriginal people and the Australian government. Putting us in the constitution will continue to allow the government to just make laws for Aboriginal people.

“Everything else will come from a treaty. We were here before Captain Cook landed but [Tony Abbott](#) still hasn’t acknowledged that. Every other country that has invaded traditional owners has developed treaties. Australia is the only one that hasn’t.”

Last week, the prime minister and opposition leader [met 40 Indigenous representatives](#) and set out a series of community consultations over a [proposed wording of a constitutional recognition of Aboriginal people](#).

Abbott said that the meeting, attended by leading Aboriginal figures including Noel Pearson, Pat Dodson and Warren Mundine, had “laid out a process which will enable all Australians to

have a deeper, better informed and much more structured conversation about what this constitutional change could look like”.

However, Sansbury said the views of these Aboriginal leaders didn't accurately represent the wider indigenous community.

“The government has selected these so-called leaders to talk to them and to negotiate and that's a big problem,” he said. “We still have suicides in prisons, deaths in custody, communities under threat. And yet these issues aren't being raised.

“State and federal governments need to put aside these personalities and sit down and talk to real grassroots Aboriginal people on how to improve Aboriginal lives.”

Sansbury, 66, has been awarded the lifetime achievement award at the [Naidoc](#) awards for his advocacy work. Other winners include Rosalie Kunoth Monk as person of the year and Veronica Perrule Dobson as female elder of the year.

Sansbury, who was born and raised on an Aboriginal reserve on South Australia's Yorke Peninsula, has campaigned over the issue of Aboriginal deaths in custody. He was chairman of the Aboriginal justice advisory committee for more than 10 years and supported the families of 18 Aboriginal people who died in custody.

The Narungga elder has been a vocal critic of [funding cuts aimed at Aboriginal services](#) and what he's labeled a “social genocide” of Indigenous art and heritage.

Congratulating the award winners at the culmination of Naidoc week in Adelaide, Nigel Scullion, the indigenous affairs minister, said: “The award recipients have excelled in their chosen fields and have demonstrated passion and determination to improve the lives of people on a local, national and even international scale.”