

Indigenous constitutional recognition would 'be a spear to the heart of racists'

Indigenous affairs minister, Nigel Scullion, says the Coalition will continue working towards securing constitutional change, but the process won't be fast tracked



Indigenous Affairs Minister Nigel Scullion speaking at the Garma Festival key forum in north-eastern Arnhem Land on Saturday. Photograph: Yothu Yindi Foundation/AAP

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Saturday 2 August 2014 16.55 AEST Last modified on Tuesday 30 September 2014 19.28 AEST

Recognising Indigenous people in the constitution will put a “spear through the hearts of racists in Australia” but the process will not be fast tracked, the government’s Indigenous affairs minister has said.

Senator Nigel Scullion, speaking at the Garma festival in the [Northern Territory](#), said the Coalition would follow the consultation process set to run for the rest of the year on the exact wording of the constitutional change.

With the Coalition, Labor and the Greens all supporting recognition of Indigenous people in the constitution, some Indigenous leaders have called for the process to be sped up.

“We have to think carefully about the wording, we don’t want a rushed job,” Scullion said. “We are doing the work of building public awareness on this. We’ve got to get everyone to participate in the conversation on this.”

Scullion said a recent Facebook page he saw which contained racist abuse aimed at Indigenous people was proof that “we still haven’t got it right in this country.”

“Having a special recognition in the constitution will be sending a message to racists: ‘It isn’t cool to be racist, get back under your rock.’”

“An overwhelming number of Australians believe racism cannot exist. I think (the constitutional change) would be a real spear to the heart of racists in Australia.”



Professor Marcia Langton speaking at the Garma festival. Photograph: AAP

Scullion said more should be done to ensure Indigenous children went to school and that he was open to changes, proposed by [a senior Yolngu elder](#), to the Northern Land Council to allow Indigenous people more say on what happens on their land.

The minister added that mining billionaire Andrew Forrest’s review into Indigenous disadvantage was an “incredible document” but the government wasn’t ready to implement its most contentious proposal – that all Australians receiving welfare should have their spending managed by government. The idea would bar welfare recipients from spending their income on items such as alcohol.

Indigenous academic Marcia Langton, who spoke after Scullion, defended Forrest’s recommendations.

“Join in the spirit of Garma and do not adopt a stance of critical cynicism and arrogance,” she said. “Do not dismiss those ideas no matter how hard you think they are, because most of you do not have to walk that hard road with us.”

Langton said the lack of numeracy and literacy among Indigenous people is “a tragedy that grows year by year. We have no more time for cowardice and compromise.”