

Don't rush recognition referendum, says LNP's first Indigenous senator

Joanna Lindgren says she supports Tony Abbott and the Coalition on getting the wording exactly right



Queensland LNP senator Joanna Lindgren.

Photograph: ABC

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The first female Indigenous senator for the [Liberal National party](#) has said a referendum on constitutional recognition should not be rushed.

The newly endorsed Queensland LNP senator Joanna Lindgren – the great-niece of the first federal Indigenous parliamentarian, [Neville Bonner](#) – said the referendum was important but should not disadvantage anyone.

It would be nice if it could take place by 2017, she told ABC radio on Thursday. “But I’d rather we don’t rush into it and if the prime minister and the Coalition feel that the wording needs to be exactly right then I’m happy to support them.”

The former high school teacher plans to take a special interest in Indigenous affairs, apart from education and training.

The federal attorney general, George Brandis, has said Tony Abbott will soon sit down with Indigenous leaders, and Bill Shorten, to discuss a referendum on constitutional recognition.

He said a possible date had been given to the opposition leader.

A joint standing committee report is due in June, recommending the form of a referendum question.

Brandis also said his Liberal colleague Cory Bernardi was entitled to think a referendum was “doomed to fail”.

Bernardi, who believes recognition is a side issue for the parliament and the community, said a “no” campaign before the referendum – expected in 2017 – was inevitable, if only to give Australians an important choice.

“Anything that seeks to divide our country by race, and every proposal that I’ve heard of seeks to do exactly that, I think is doomed to fail,” he told ABC radio on Thursday.

Brandis said he respected that view, but added that his colleague was elected as part of a Coalition government that had a platform of progressing constitutional recognition.

The attorney general conceded it would be a long and slow process to get Australians onside through a national conversation.

“I think that we should be relatively modest in our aspirations here,” he told ABC radio. “Anything that is too radical is going to frighten public opinion away and a referendum would fail.”