

# Indigenous recognition: Tony Abbott plans July summit to decide strategy

Prime minister says recognising Indigenous Australians in the constitution will ‘complete our constitution, rather than simply change it’



Senator Nova Peris said the meeting was a ‘step in the right direction towards reconciliation’.  
Photograph: David Moir/AAP

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[Tony Abbott](#) will hold a summit with Indigenous leaders on 6 July in an effort to continue to build momentum for a referendum to recognise Australia’s first peoples.

The meeting would give community leaders an opportunity to discuss the question to be put to the people, and the model for the referendum. A parliamentary committee has consulted on the question and the model, but its report, which is due by the end of June, has not yet been released.

Abbott and the opposition leader, Bill Shorten, have pledged to work together on the referendum, which the prime minister has slated for 2017, in time for the 50th anniversary of [Indigenous Australians](#) being counted in the census.

“The meeting will help to inform the process for deciding on a referendum proposal that will have the best chance of success,” Abbott said. “Recognising Indigenous Australians in the constitution will complete our constitution, rather than simply change it.”

“This should be a unifying moment for our nation and this meeting will be an important part of this journey.”

Shorten welcomed the announcement of the meeting. “It’s time to sit down with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders in a serious and considered way, to listen,” he said. “We cannot afford to lose momentum.”

The Labor senator [Nova Peris](#) said the meeting was a “step in the right direction towards reconciliation”.

“This has occurred as a result of tireless efforts by campaigners all over the nation, and I’m proud to be a part of the committee on constitutional recognition.”

High-profile community leaders such as Pat Dodson, Noel Pearson and Galarrwuy Yunupingu are expected to attend the July event, along with the chairman of the prime minister’s Indigenous advisory council, Warren Mundine, and the social justice commissioner, Mick Gooda.

Tanya Hosch, the joint campaign director of Recognise, said the time was right to progress with the issue of constitutional recognition.

“This is very good news. If we are to make this historic change before the 50th anniversary of the 1967 referendum we cannot afford this issue to drift any further. Recognise welcomes this announcement and looks forward to working with the leaders ahead of this meeting,” she said.

Public support for the recognition of Australia’s first peoples in the nation’s founding document is high, with a recent survey undertaken by Recognise showing most people in the majority of states [would support the move if a referendum were held today](#) – the requirement for the change to pass.