

# Nova Peris supports Indigenous plebiscite on constitutional recognition

Northern Territory senator backs Noel Pearson's proposal for plebiscite to be held once a question is devised but before a referendum



Nova Peris: 'We have to ensure that whatever is put to the Australian public is what Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people want.' Photograph: David Moir/AAP

[Helen Davidson](#) in Darwin

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The [Northern Territory](#) senator Nova Peris has thrown her support behind a plebiscite of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on constitutional recognition ahead of a national referendum.

Cape York Aboriginal leader Noel Pearson [proposed a plebiscite](#) at Monday's meeting of political and Indigenous representatives in Sydney. Under his proposal it would be held once a question was devised but before the referendum, to ensure it had the full support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people.

The meeting, which included the prime minister, Tony Abbott, opposition leader Bill Shorten and 40 Indigenous leaders, set out a timeline for the question itself to be [finalised by mid-2016](#), and an optimistic deadline of 2017 for the referendum. About 40 community consultations will also be held.

Speaking in Darwin on Wednesday, Peris told reporters she supported Pearson's plebiscite suggestion, saying: "To me personally I don't think it's such a bad idea because at least it engages and gives a bit of ownership to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people."

“After all, we’ve been here for more than 40,000 years and to change this nation’s founding document [to be] inclusive of our cultures and our peoples, we have to ensure that whatever is put to the Australian public is what Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people want.”

Peris is the deputy chairwoman of the parliamentary joint committee on constitutional recognition.

There has been [a vocal opposition to the push for constitutional recognition](#), including from some Indigenous people, but Peris said there was a lot of confusion around the official government-funded Recognise campaign, and greater engagement was needed with grassroots groups.

While the campaign had done an “incredible job” of raising awareness, it also needed a question to be put to the public, Peris said.

“I think that’s where the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the grassroots people, feel they have been disconnected. So it is important that we .... reconnect with the grassroots people to reassure them that constitutional recognition and substantial change is required for this country to move forward.”

Peris disagreed with Pearson’s comments that Monday’s event had been [“stage-managed.”](#)

“Noel Pearson is entitled to his opinion, but I think we all walked away knowing there was a consensus and we all felt positive that [progress] was made going forward,” said Peris.

She said there was strong consensus in the room, that there was a process in place “to engage with Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people right across this country in the form of conventions, which is paramount for this to be successful, because if Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people aren’t happy then this will be doomed to failure.”