

# Linda Burney blasts Nigel Scullion as a 'failed' Indigenous affairs minister



- [Fergus Hunter](#)

Newly elected Labor frontbencher Linda Burney says that Indigenous Affairs Minister Nigel Scullion is a failure, pointing to recent cuts to Indigenous funding and his hostile relationship with advocacy group the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples.

Ms Burney, former NSW deputy opposition leader and the first Indigenous woman elected to the House of Representatives, also expressed frustration that treaties and the referendum on constitutional recognition for Indigenous people were being presented as mutually exclusive options.

"My view is that Nigel Scullion has failed as Aboriginal affairs minister. You just look at the funding arrangements and lack of money or the money that's being lost. We in Labor have taken a different view. [Opposition Leader] Bill Shorten is the shadow minister for Aboriginal affairs, supported by [Yawuru man and WA senator] Pat Dodson," Ms Burney told ABC radio.

She said that Labor would continue to consult with Indigenous bodies including National Congress, which was criticised as not representative by Senator Scullion in May when he announced their government funding would be discontinued.



*Opposition spokeswoman for human services Linda Burney. Photo: Mark Jesser*

When the Northern Territory senator was reappointed to the ministry in the re-elected Coalition government, the group expressed "concern" but said it was willing to work with him.

In his recent reshuffle, Mr Shorten appointed himself opposition spokesman for Indigenous Affairs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, elevating Senator Dodson – the "Father of Reconciliation" – as his assistant minister.

Ms Burney, who served as minister for community services and youth in the former NSW Labor government, was appointed opposition spokeswoman for human services in the outer ministry.

Echoing the positions of many prominent Indigenous figures, including Senator Dodson, she said that the referendum and treaties between Indigenous people and the government were compatible options.



Mick Gooda *Photo: Peter Eve/Yothu Yindi Foundation*

"I don't think its a waste of resources at all [to seek constitutional recognition] and I'm increasingly intrigued and slightly annoyed that it is being presented as either a treaty or constitutional recognition. I think that's mischievous and it's also very misleading," she said.

[A recent poll](#) showed 60 per cent support for an amendment to the constitution recognising Indigenous people and 59 per cent support for a treaty.

Former NSW minister Linda Burney has gone straight into Bill Shorten's shadow ministry - she's the first indigenous woman to be elected to the House of Representatives. Courtesy ABC News 24.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner and Referendum Council member Mick Gooda said that a May referendum, to coincide with the the 50th anniversary of 1967 vote to count Indigenous people in the census, was not going to happen.

"It's too late. We won't finish our consultations until the end of this year. The timing just, in my view now, doesn't allow for it. As for the wording, we're nowhere near it," he said.

Ms Burney made the case for constitutional change to not only remove the race powers but also tell the truth on the nation's "birth certificate".

"What I'm fundamentally about is this notion of truth-telling. And part of that is making sure that our constitution reflects who we are as a country," she said.

"This is not about apportioning blame, this is about creating a country where we all understand how it was made and what happened to our first peoples in that making. And it's not about making people feel guilty, that is not what it's about.

"It's actually about us all owning the story of Australia and also recognising what actually took place here and legitimising the Aboriginal part of the tapestry of our nation."

Ms Burney predicted a successful referendum would set the country up to deal more effectively with Indigenous social disadvantage.

She also agreed with Mr Gooda that a single treaty between the government and the 250 separate Aboriginal nations was "impossible".