

# 'It's not going to happen': Barnaby Joyce rejects push for Aboriginal body in constitution



- [Fergus Hunter](#)

Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce has rejected a push from Aboriginal community leaders for a constitutionally-enshrined Indigenous body to influence policy in Canberra, predicting "it's not going to happen".

As Mr Joyce called for "substantive" but practical progress on Aboriginal reconciliation, two of Australia's most senior Indigenous politicians rallied behind the importance of a national referendum on the issue, warning it must be done right or could set the cause back for generations.

Last week's national convention of Indigenous community leaders at Uluru rejected symbolic recognition on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the constitution, [instead calling for a "First Nations Voice" and a plan for treaties between Aboriginal people and the government](#).

"If you overreach in politics and ask for something that will not be supported by the Australian people such as another chamber in politics or something that sort of sits above or beside the Senate, that idea just won't fly," Mr Joyce said on Monday.

Shireen Morris, senior policy adviser at the Cape York Institute, said Mr Joyce's comments showed he misunderstood the proposal.

"There is no suggestion at all there should be a new third chamber of Parliament," Ms Morris told ABC.

"The proposal for a first people's voice is a proposal for an external advisory body, so an advisory body that is outside parliament, outside government."

The Nationals leader did express openness to some kind of treaty.



*Acting Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce Photo: Andrew Meares*

"You show me what's in the treaty and I'll tell you what the appetite will be," he replied when asked if the public would support a national treaty with Indigenous Australians.

Linda Burney, Labor's spokeswoman for human services, said the Uluru statement was silent on recognising Aboriginal people in the constitution.

"The issue of recognition has to be dealt with and I think it's important to have that recognition within the constitution, that truth-telling," she told ABC radio.

Ms Burney cautioned that a constitutional proposal must remain feasible because its failure could see progress "set back two or three generations".

Ken Wyatt, the Aged Care and Indigenous Health Minister, said he was "extremely confident" a referendum could be held in 2018.

Mr Wyatt also warned the aspirations laid out at Uluru had the potential to be seized upon by people agitating against change.

He said "extremely important" bipartisanship from Opposition Leader Bill Shorten and Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull has remained constant and noted no referendum had ever succeeded where there has been division between the major parties.

On Saturday, Mr Turnbull [expressed caution about the outcome from Uluru](#) and emphasised the importance of there being minimal opposition to any referendum proposal.

Mr Turnbull referenced the uphill battle that referendums face because voters are "constitutionally conservative". Only eight of the 44 held since 1901 have been successful.

The findings of the Uluru convention, which capped off a dozen regional dialogues around the country, will now be factored into the Referendum Council's report to the Parliament, due to be delivered in five weeks.