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Congress in a position to be the Indigenous voice to parliament

The National Congress of Australia's First Peoples (Congress) endorses the establishment of a constitutionally mandated representative body for First Peoples, as recommended in the Uluru Statement. Congress is in a unique position to be this Indigenous voice in parliament, as we are the national representative body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

If properly resourced to give advice, monitor and evaluate government performance on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues, Congress could operate as an independent advisory body to parliament. This means we are in a prime position to become the constitutionally enshrined Indigenous voice to parliament.

National Congress began operations in 2011 and has grown to become the largest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organization in the country, counting as members over 180 organizations and almost 9,000 individual members. Congress lays claim to almost double the membership on a per capita basis than all the major Australian political parties combined for their respective constituencies. As the national representative body we have the capacity and the infrastructure to be the Indigenous voice to parliament.

There have been legislatively enacted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander national representative bodies since the 1970s, but all have been disbanded with changes of government. This is why a representative body for First Peoples must be constitutionally enshrined.

Supported in 2009 by bipartisan agreement, Congress is the fourth iteration of a national representative body. It took eight years to establish Congress and is the result of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community meetings throughout the country, peak body talks, a national forum and written submissions.

Let's ensure that Congress is in everybody's mind when discussing the future of constitutional reform.

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