

## [Transcript] Mamamia Out Loud / Your Hard Questions About The Voice, Answered.

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Mamma Mia acknowledges the traditional owners of land and waters that this podcast is recorded on.

Mamma Mia Out Loud!

Welcome to Mamma Mia Out Loud. I'm Holly Wainwright.

I'm Mia Friedman.

And I'm Claire Stevens.

And today we have a very special bonus episode for you.

On Saturday the 14th of October every Australian eligible to vote will be writing yes or no on a ballot that decides whether our nation is going to make a change to our constitution.

The question you'll be asked is...

A proposed law to alter the constitution to recognise the first peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice.

Do you approve this proposed alteration?

If that sounds like a simple question, the conversation around it has been anything but.

And we said a while ago on Out Loud that we were going to put any questions that Out Loud has had for us about the voice

to someone who knows a lot more about it than Mia, Claire and I do.

Today's that day.

Joining us in the studio to answer questions most asked by our listeners

is Quantum Walker Woman and National Indigenous correspondent at the ABC, Carly Williams.

Welcome Carly.

Thank you so much. It's great to be here.

Carly, you've been very busy creating a brilliant podcast with your co-host Fran Kelly for the ABC called

The Voice Referendum Explained, which is exactly what the title suggests.

It's everything you need to know about the voice to parliament referendum.

And lots of Out Louders have written to us wanting to know different things.

And I want to start with the first question and probably the most common one that we got from Out Louders.

How will the voice work? Will the advisory body have a voice for all future legislations?

And will they have the power to overturn or veto future legislations?

That's a great question.

And, you know, constitutional reform isn't exactly bedside reading.

It's dense and we need to have these conversations and have things explained, especially for us who haven't voted in a referendum before the last one.

How old are you?

I'm 36 and proud of it now.

That's true. The last one was, did you say 1994?

1999. So the Republic referendum, I would have been in grade seven.

So, yeah, it's the first time we're voting in a referendum for some of us.

But how will the voice work?

Well, we have detail about the voices design principles.

It will be made up of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from across the country.

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And it will be chosen by First Nations people.

It'll be independent from government and it will give advice only.

Advice to the executive government and parliament on issues that affect First Nations people.

It won't have power to introduce or overturn legislation.

It won't be a veto. It's to give advice.

It won't deliver services and it won't give out grants.

So what sort of advice could it give?

Real life example, Barrister Tony McAvoy, he's part of the yes camp.

He uses this example.

Superannuation access.

Say the parliament's considering legislation or a bill around lowering the age that we can get access to that superannuation.

The voice might give advice and say, well, you know,

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a life expectancy 10 years less than non-Indigenous Australians.

So why don't we consider this that so many Aboriginal people work their whole lives and they don't get to retire and they don't get to enjoy their superannuation.

They die before that.

And we should say that you are a journalist.

You're a journalist for the ABC.

This is not about your opinions.

This is not about what you think as an Indigenous woman or even as just an Australian.

This is just facts.

These are facts and what we have gathered.

So interviewing many Indigenous people across the country from elders to academics.

Yes, politicians, but grassroots people, people who are social workers,

who work with youth and work in health and at land councils and mums and getting through their everyday lives.

Those are the people we've spoken to and, you know, I'll be attributing them along the way.

On that, one of the really common questions we have been asked is this one, which I'm sure you have been asked before.

Why should I vote yes when there are prominent First Nations voices that don't support a voice to parliament?

Why don't they?

Well, there are many diverse First Nations perspectives on not just the voice but for everything.

There are so many different nations and mobs.

It's not one homogenous group.

There's a huge range of views.

And there's no other group in Australia that is expected to have a collective opinion on political matters.

Like women, for example, when people talk about the women's vote.

I'd like to say also actually on that question that one of the sort of sentiments that was attached to that question quite often was that

non-Indigenous Australians were like, oh, it feels like I'm making a decision on behalf of Indigenous

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people and they might not want me to make this decision.  
It's hard because, you know, Aboriginal people, historically, we've not been listened to.  
So I can understand people want to listen to mob at this time.  
And that's great.  
It's about seeking out perspectives from both sides and feeling informed.  
And yes, some Indigenous people are not keen on a voice.  
It's important to understand there are two no camps.  
There's the official no campaign, which is led by the opposition leader Peter Dutton and prominent Indigenous leaders like Warren Mundean and just in turn Nampakimba Price.  
Division, division, division.  
That's basically what this referendum is about.  
It's been this since the beginning.  
Do we divide our country along the lines of race within our nation's rulebook?  
Do we divide our country within our constitution?  
The Prime Minister is suggesting that this is the only way forward to support our most marginalised Indigenous Australians.  
At no point did he actually make reference to Indigenous Australians who he claims this proposal is supposed to support going forward.  
That's a conservative no.  
They say the voice is too risky.  
There's too many unknowns.  
But then there's a progressive black no, which they're not in the Dutton camp.  
This is Senator Lydia Thorpe, Murrow Worry Man Fred Hooper.  
They were at the Uluru Convention in 2017.  
They walked out because they didn't agree with the Uluru statement.  
Is that because they didn't feel that it went far enough?  
Yes, it's not powerful enough.  
They didn't want voice to come first.  
They wanted treaty to come first.  
So Lydia Thorpe represents the black sovereign movement.  
Catastrophe, where this country needs Indigenous knowledge.  
And the only meaningful way to get that is through a treaty.  
Treaty can bring us Senate seats with real power, not advisory.  
Nothing's going to change by an advisory body.  
We've told the government that we don't want a seat sovereignty.  
We've told the government to implement the Royal Commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody.  
They're bringing them home report.  
It's so simple.  
And she says the voice is just advice.  
It's a pleasing white guilt.  
She has said that before.  
And we've had similar advisory groups and that advice has not been listened to.  
So treaty is really what the black sovereign movement want to see first.  
And we do have polls too.

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They were done earlier this year and they were commissioned by the Yes Camp that show 80% of Indigenous people do want the voice.

Well, Indigenous people overwhelmingly want it.

All the surveys show that somewhere between 80% and 90% of Indigenous Australians want this. This came from them.

This isn't something that's come from Canberra.

There was a five-year process leading up to a First Nations constitutional convention when the Uluru Statement from the Heart, that's where it came from.

Delegates from all over Australia came together and they said, we want to be recognised in the constitution.

I found that number really interesting because sometimes the people who feel the most strongly speak the loudest

and it can give you a skewed sense of how many Indigenous people are in support of the voice and how many aren't.

And I think once I heard that 80% number, it made sense.

And then I thought about the idea of no group of people have a homogenous one view.

They're not a monolith.

And yeah, I think that 80% made a lot of difference to a lot of people.

Those people who are arguing that the voice doesn't go far enough, is there any overlap between the voice and the idea of treaty?

So if somebody is advocating that treaty is more important, is the voice a step towards treaty? Absolutely.

After these 12 dialogues, the Uluru Dialogues, which were meetings in 2016-2017, they were meetings across the country.

About 100 First Nations people attended each of these meetings

and they wanted to figure out how do we best recognise us mob in the constitution?

What does that look like?

That all came together at Uluru at the Uluru Convention in 2017.

And the consensus was the Uluru Statement, which calls for reforms, a sequence of reforms. Voice, treaty, truth in that order.

What they want is a voice first and then a voice can negotiate treaty, a national treaty.

And we've already got some jurisdictions that are looking at treaties.

Victoria is far down the line.

Queensland's taking a look at that.

Pat Dodson, Labor Senator, he has said to us, who are you going to negotiate with?

The voice is there to take us to the next steps of treaty.

Makarata is a Yonngu word for coming together after a conflict.

It's about agreement making and the Makarata Commission is what comes after the voice to parliament.

That's what advocates want in that order.

And Marcia Langton, she says we can chew gum and walk at the same time, but we need that voice first.

One question we were asked again and again was who will be in the advisory body and how many

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people will there be?

How will it be selected?

Will they be voted for among Indigenous communities?

There seems to be a concern that it's only going to represent certain Indigenous people, like elite Indigenous people, academics and not grassroots people who understand their communities.

Yeah, totally. Well, that detail is yet to be announced.

And it's important to remember when we vote at even federal elections and state elections, we go in and vote for that MP.

We don't know exactly what legislation they're going to be putting across the line in the years to come.

We don't know how that sausage is going to be made.

So it is quite normal that this detail can be worked out afterwards.

The coalition government, they commissioned the Professor Marcia Langton and Tom Karma report, a co-design report, and it looked at a blueprint of how the voice could look.

And it recommended that a national voice have 24 members, that it have a gender balance.

And to bear with me, it would be two members from each state, the Northern Territory ACT and Torres Strait.

Five members would represent remote areas due to their unique needs.

And another member would rep Torres Strait Islander mob on the mainland.

There would be a limit to how long these people could serve.

And the Langton Karma report proposed local and regional voices would then feed up into that national voice.

I've heard that too. You know, it's the Canberra elites.

It's only going to represent urban, you know, city mob on the East Coast.

I do know that the yes prominent voices, Noel Pearson, Professor Marcia Langton have pushed back on that

and said this 200 and something page report makes sure that those regional, very remote people will be represented.

But it's only a blueprint the government haven't, you know, signed up to the Marcia Langton Tom Karma report.

And is that fact that it is only a blueprint where the criticism that we don't know all the detail comes from?

And it's because no, we actually don't know all the detail because we're working on a blueprint.

And then if we get the change, the detail will be worked out.

Yeah, then the parliament will be deciding what sort of model that the voice will use.

And that, yes, that is just a blueprint.

It has left things open for criticism and criticism from Indigenous Australians as well.

An outlier named Sue has sent in this question.

Hi, Mamma Mia ladies. Just have a question about the voice.

So my mother listens to a lot of talk back radio and one of the arguments that she has been hearing and then sharing with me is that one of the reasons why the voice has been brought about at all is because it's a precursor to Australia becoming a republic.

And these people are arguing that the United Nations actually won't let Australia become a republic

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unless we have some sort of Indigenous recognition in place such as the voice.  
And so that all of this is in the lead up to us becoming a republic.  
And so there are many people in society that don't want us to become a republic and therefore don't want us to go through with this Indigenous voice.  
So I'm wondering if you could find out about this.  
It's an interesting one.  
It is. We know about the feelings about the republic in Australia because when the king got his coronation and I wrote that republican piece, we got quite slammed.  
We were talking just before about the last referendum into whether we'd become a republic or not, which was in 1999.  
And we went to that referendum without an Indigenous voice to parliament in place.  
So I think that might be a bit of a myth.  
Well, the government has not said that the Indigenous voice to parliament is a prerequisite to have a referendum on cutting the monarchy loose and becoming a republic.  
The PMs recently said the republic referendum is not imminent, but he is a republican after his election in May 2022.  
He did appoint a minister for the republic.  
But the two referendums, the two issues are not linked.  
We have received lots of questions about why we need this voice.  
And there are a lot of people who are arguing, you know, we live in a democracy.  
Why do we need a separate voice for Indigenous Australians?  
So they've asked, why do we need a voice to parliament?  
The government already works in close collaboration with First Nations communities to implement programs and initiatives.  
How will the voice be different?  
True, we already have got organisations and advisory bodies that give advice to all levels of government.  
Sometimes that advice goes ignored.  
But what we're dealing with is closing the gap targets that are going backwards.  
Some of them terrible suicide rates and still entrenched disadvantage.  
So let's look at youth programs.  
For example, there are great programs around the country already Aboriginal run helping youth in areas like Alice Springs or Tennant Creek, keeping them engaged and out of trouble.  
These programs receive short bursts of funding.  
A lot of the time it's never years at a time.  
Forget about a decade.  
It's six months to 12 months.  
And they've got the data to show incidents, you know, of vandalism are going down when this after school program is in full swing.  
And they sort of have to keep reapplying, which is a huge process to get funding.  
Cheryl Kickett Tucker, she's a Noongar woman in Perth.  
She runs a youth program in WA.  
She is a yes voter.

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She says the voice would make her life easier because she would be able to give advice of where the money should flow and get that investment.

Ian Brown from the Gomorrah Nation, Northern West New South Wales.

He says a voice is just advice and it doesn't go far enough.

He's a treaty person.

Either way, enshrining a voice in Australia's constitution means it is there forever.

The next government can't dump it.

They can't get rid of it.

Can they change it?

They can change the way it looks.

Yes.

So the details we were talking about before, the government of the day could tweak those.

They can tweak it.

But they can't abolish it in the way that previous advisory bodies of this nature have been abolished.

That's right.

If it was a legislated voice, only legislated, which is what opposition leader Peter Dutton says that he will take us to another referendum if he is in government.

And he would just have constitutional recognition, just saying, yes, your followers were here first, but no voice.

He's talked about in the past wanting to legislate an advisory body.

But that is not what the Uluru statement and the folks who were involved with the Uluru statement want.

They don't want it legislated.

They want it written in forever and ever.

Many outlaws are feeling the pressure, Carly, of making the right decision for the vote.

Lydia sent us this voice memo.

As a modern immigrant that moved to Australia about 10 years ago, what I'm really struggling with is I just want to make the right decision.

On behalf of First Nations and Indigenous peoples, I think after all the damage we've done over the past 200 years, it's the least we can do.

But what I am struggling with is when I watch NITV on Instagram or other First Nations and Indigenous voices that are not in support of the voice,

I am concerned that I'm speaking on behalf of somebody that I should not be speaking on behalf of by voting.

I want to vote yes. It feels like the right thing to do.

And obviously there are many, many pro and positive Indigenous and First Nations voices in the media saying that that's what we should do.

But how do we know?

I just don't want to do the wrong thing.

And it's a small act to vote, but it has such a large impact.

So Carly, I suppose the question that Lydia is trying to ask is,

what will the impact be on First Nations people if the referendum is passed?

Lydia, that was a great question.

And it is hard because, you know, First Nations people are just 4% of the population.

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And the majority of Australia is making the decision about our future.  
Constitution is very hard to change.  
These referendums don't come around very often.  
We may have differing views, but it is important to remember when you're tossing up how you should vote that yes,  
that's really a statement did come from Indigenous people.  
So what will change for Indigenous people if the voice is up?  
Well, the voice advocates say that it's self-determination.  
It's local mob making decisions, what is best for their community.  
And we know that that works.  
When we get a say in our business, we have fruitful outcomes.  
Advocates of the voice say that those involved with the voice will be held accountable.  
You know, they'll have to hand in reports.  
They're promising that this will better the lives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.  
Do we have a crystal ball?  
How quick will that happen?  
Will it definitely happen?  
It's hard to say.  
We sort of have to trust those who are involved, just like we do at any other election.  
But they say when it's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people giving advice on issues that affect them,  
the seat of the table, it will better the lives of us mob.  
Will there be any changes for non-Indigenous Australians?  
So there are people who argue that their land could be affected or they'll have to pay more tax or people who think that their day-to-day lives are going to be affected if the voice passes.  
Is that something people should be concerned about?  
What will it change for non-Indigenous people if the voice gets over the line?  
I don't think a lot.  
Let me just say we're not coming for your backyards.  
We're not coming for your houses or your properties.  
And that is a misinformation, scare campaign and disinformation as well.  
You know, when people are sharing things inaccurate on purpose and misinformation is when they're sharing things,  
not realising they're inaccurate.  
The land grab we're coming for people's property, I must say, is inaccurate.  
And that's not coming from the official no side.  
This is sort of networks of fake bots on social media.  
It's game on good.  
The First People's Assembly in Victoria, there was a letter put out with their letterhead pretending to be them saying, you know, that they were coming for farmers' properties.  
That's just not true.  
I've heard, yes, advocates say there is a lot of money put aside for Aboriginal affairs in each budget.  
And if that money is streaming to the wrong places because, you know,  
there might be white decision makers in Canberra making those decisions,



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that's a waste of everyone's taxpayer dollars.

What the voice advocates say is, you know, if Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are advising

where that money should be challenged to, the places we need at most,

the housing, the disadvantaged education and health to get those outcomes to be better,

then that is saving all of Australians money.

And just finally, Carly, you talk about the tangible impacts on Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

I just want to ask you about the intangible impact.

From Indigenous people, what are they saying about the impact of a no vote and the impact of a yes vote,

and what that would do?

Well, let me start off by saying, and you mentioned it earlier,

it's a really rough, rough time at the moment.

I've had elders tell me, you know, like we've been through a lot where we're resilient people, but we have no other choice but to endure this.

And many mob who didn't ask for the referendum and who weren't involved with the Uluru Statement

and who were happy doing grassroots work and advising local government or state government say, we didn't ask for this referendum.

I didn't ask to log on to whatever social app it is and see these racist comments

or have people accuse me that I'm going to take their things.

And I think we can't underestimate the mental toll and the cultural load this has put on people.

And I am in no way comparing plights here.

But in 2017, we had the marriage equality debate where, you know,

people's rights were decided by the majority of the country again.

I spoke to an Indigenous doctor in Coffs Harbour recently who's also part of the LGBT community.

She said, this is the second time in so many years that I've had my rights up for debate.

She was a, yes, voter and she's an environmental scientist and does a lot of work in that space.

And she has a teenage daughter and she said, you know, my daughter's had to watch me go through this twice.

It's just a strain on us.

Can I ask you, Carly, just on that, because I know a lot of our listeners and non-Indigenous listeners will be really distressed to hear that as they should be.

How can we avoid being part of that problem?

You talked before about misinformation, you know, that might be leading to more extreme reactions.

Is there anything that lessens this load?

I'm not sure.

I mean, calling it out when you know something is false and inaccurate is always very helpful.

You see your Aboriginal friend at a backyard barbeque being bombarded with questions or interrogated.

Step in and just say, hey, like I can answer some of these questions too.

Like let's get on Google or let's listen to the Mamma Mia podcast or the voice referendum explain podcast on the ABC.

And just helping out in that way.

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Reporting inaccurate information and those fake posts is always helpful.

I've also been told people they may want to step away from their public advocacy work if it doesn't go their way,

whether it is yes or no.

And I really hope that doesn't happen.

There will be a huge void of First Nations incredible people from the grassroots up if they feel like they want to step away because it's too much.

I think that would be a terrible loss.

Whatever the outcome is, the wheels still turn the next day for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We'll still be going to work and dealing with things that we deal with and resilience is in our DNA.

So on to the next thing.

But you know, Anthony Albanese, the Prime Minister has said that this is the only form of constitutional recognition that he's looking at.

If there is somebody listening right now who feels undecided and feels like they're getting lots of conflicting information,

what would your advice be on, OK, you want to make up your mind?

This is what you need to look at in order to make up your mind.

Listening to First Nations people and their perspectives is a good idea.

And your credible news sites and interrogating anything that sort of sounds like it could be a little bit out there and keeping you informed that way.

There is the Tom Karma and Marcia Langton report.

Not everybody wants to pick up a 200 and something page report.

I get that there are lots of solid documentaries out there on the voice like the road to the voice referendum.

SBS has got a great one.

NITV, The Point.

I saw that Sky News was on my family's home island of Minjiraba with the S23 director, Dean Parkin, looking at his story.

And then, of course, podcasts like yourself.

I think, yeah, having the conversations really coming together a bit more and there is official community hall gatherings across the country.

And it's just about getting across those and going.

And they're not all yes-sided or no-sided.

Some of them I went to Bowerville in the Mid-North Coast of New South Wales recently and the community hall there were just having information night sessions.

So everyone can come together and share their concerns, ask questions and they had people from the community there, elders from the community who were voting no and voting yes.

And just all coming together and saying, this is why I'm doing this.

And it can be a kind and respectful debate.

I want to thank you so much for coming in and answering the Out Louders questions today because I know we're adding to the load that you're carrying.

But as obviously a First Nations journalist, we really, really appreciate you doing that.

So thank you so much, Carly.

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Thank you for including me and it's a big time.

But it's an important conversation.

It really is.

Out Louders, we hope this episode has provided you with some more information that could help you make that informed decision on the 14th of October.

If you want to learn more, please do go and check out Carly's podcast, The Voice Referendum Explained on ABC.

We will link to it in our show notes.

Thank you for listening to Australia's number one news and pop culture show.

The episode was produced by Emily Casillas, assistant producer Tali Blackman with audio production from Leah Porges.

And thank you again, Carly.

Thanks, Carly.

Thank you.