
Morrison offers hope on Indigenous voice

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Scott Morrison's measured public statements about the Indigenous voice have given hope to reformists that he has not closed his mind to the possibility that a government he leads could take Australians to a referendum on the matter.

The Prime Minister has carefully adhered to the Liberal Party's May 2019 policy document in his most recent public remarks about the voice, deferring decisions about whether it should be constitutionally enshrined until its design is settled and after Australians have had a chance to see what the voice looks like and how it will work in practice.

"This process will develop up a question for a referendum and what a referendum will deliver — because no one can answer what a voice to parliament actually is at the moment," the Liberal Party's 2019 document states.

When the 2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart called for the establishment of a First Nations voice enshrined in the constitution, the Turnbull government formally opposed the document in a decision of cabinet.

However, both Labor and the Coalition support the broad concept of an Indigenous voice as a way for Indigenous Australians — particularly in remote and regional areas — to be heard on the decisions that affect them. How or if it should be given constitutional protection has since been the subject of much public debate.

Mark Leibler, former co-chair of the Referendum Council and the Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, describes Mr Morrison as more open-minded than his predecessor, Malcolm Turnbull, on the issue of an Indigenous voice. "Through my own dealings with the Prime Minister, I believe his publicly expressed open-mindedness on whether a government he leads will take the question of a constitutionally enshrined voice for Indigenous Australians to a referendum is sincere," Mr Leibler writes in *The Australian* on Friday.

"While equally mindful of the objections of a relatively small number of his more conservative colleagues, Scott Morrison, unlike his predecessor, remains genuinely open to the idea."

MARK LEIBLER PII
