

# Referendum boss backing Pearson on voice

GREG BROWN  
PAIGE TAYLOR

Mark Leibler, the co-chair of the Referendum Council that endorsed the Uluru Statement from the Heart, has backed Noel Pearson's call for constitutional recognition to be fast-tracked ahead of a legislated voice to government.

In a submission to the advisory panel that is co-designing a "voice to government", Mr Leibler, a partner at Arnold Bloch Leibler, said a legislated voice would not attract the support of Aboriginal Australians.

It is among the 85 per cent of submissions to government on the design of the voice that support the Indigenous advisory body being enshrined in the Constitution.

"As part of the final phase of the co-design process, an exposure draft bill for the voice should now be developed, as well as options for the wording of a possible consti-

titutional amendment," Mr Leibler wrote. "As a purely legislated voice would be highly unlikely to attract support from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and therefore unlikely to attract support from the wider community, enabling legislation should only be passed subsequent to a successful referendum."

He also wrote that, contrary to the recommendations in the interim report on the voice design, "policymakers should be obliged, rather than purely expected, to consult the advisory voice".

The submission shows the growing divide among supporters of the Uluru Statement from the Heart about how constitutional recognition should be progressed.

The proposal for a constitutionally enshrined voice was formed in the Uluru Statement from the Heart in 2017 but rejected by then prime minister Malcolm Turnbull as a "third chamber to parliament".

The Morrison government is

## Aboriginal women the 'hidden victims' of sexual violence

Aboriginal women killed as a result of sexual and domestic violence are Australia's "hidden victims", a relative of an Indigenous teenager who died after being assaulted has told federal politicians.

As sexual assault and harassment allegations engulf federal politics, the cousin of Layla Leering, who died in the Northern Territory in 2017, told politicians about the "toxic, vicious community culture" which sees Indigenous women

experience violence at significantly higher rates than non-Indigenous women. Indigenous women are 32 times more likely to be hospitalised due to family violence.

Cheron Long delivered the speech alongside Alice Springs Deputy Mayor Jacinta Price to a group of Coalition MPs and senators, including outgoing MP Nicolle Flint.

"There is alcohol-fuelled violence in our community every day, too much drunk fighting," the mother of two said. "It is not a safe or healthy environment for our kids. On any given day you can see and hear women getting assaulted."

pursuing a compromise version of the Uluru statement's proposal in the form of a "voice to government" that would be legislated but not protected in the Constitution.

Last week, the co-chairs of the group co-designing an Indigenous

voice to government — Marcia Langton and Tom Calma — said taking the proposal to a referendum before it was legislated risked scuppering the entire reform.

Professor Calma and Professor

Langton pushed back against Mr Pearson, who used a speech last Wednesday to call for the delay of the Indigenous advisory body until there could be a referendum to recognise Indigenous Australians in the Constitution.

Her cousin, Ms Leering, was one of three teenagers whose deaths were investigated by NT Coroner Greg Cavanaugh last year after police first deemed them to be suicide. But her family members believe she was murdered and Mr Cavanaugh has since ordered the police investigation to be reopened.

Ms Long told the group Indigenous women were forced to live with an "Aboriginal rape culture".

"Sexual abuse is accepted as normal in too many Aboriginal communities," she said.

"There are so many young girls out in the bush who have no voice and are too afraid to talk

up, to tell the world what is happening to them. They are forced to be silent.

"These young ones are the hidden victims."

She said it was painful to see Change the Date marches focus on abolishing Australia Day while the high rate of violence experienced by Indigenous women and children in remote communities was sidelined.

"Australia needs to see what my mob go through every day," she said.

Ms Price said: "Aboriginal women are Australian citizens and we deserve to be heard just like other Australian women."

ADESHOLA ORE



GARY RAMAGE  
Jacinta Price, Meesha Long and Cheron Long

ment to put the voice in the Constitution.

In all, 85 per cent of published submissions on the voice support this in principal, according to an analysis by the University of NSW Indigenous Law Centre.

By Wednesday, there had been 295 public written submissions uploaded onto the government's voice website and 240 of those expressly supported constitutional enshrinement (81 per cent). An additional 12 submissions express in-principle support for constitutional enshrinement (for instance, by expressing support for the Uluru Statement from the Heart to be implemented).

The law centre identified that 58 per cent of the published comments about the voice were from non-Indigenous people.

By Tuesday, a total of 646 public submissions had reached the government department supporting the design of the voice, the National Indigenous Australians Agency, but not all had been posted online yet. Professors Calma and Langton said they welcomed all submissions. In their final report to government, they said they would note how many of the public submissions indicated support for an enshrined voice.