



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Catholic bishops endorse Uluru Statement from the Heart

MEDIA RELEASE

November 22, 2021

Australia's Catholic bishops, on the recommendation of their key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisers, have endorsed the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference made the decision as it gathered online for its biannual meeting earlier this month.

The bishops' consideration of the matter was informed by the words of St John Paul II, who in a visit to Alice Springs in 1986 said to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples: "Your culture, which shows the lasting genius and dignity of your race, must not be allowed to disappear... Your songs, your stories, your paintings, your dances, your languages, must never be lost."

Bishop Columba Macbeth-Green OSPPE, chair of the Bishops Commission for Relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, said the Bishops Conference had been awaiting guidance on the Statement from the Heart.

"We are very grateful for the reflections of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council in helping shape our thinking on this important subject," Bishop Macbeth-Green said.

"That Council recently endorsed the Statement from the Heart, and we have listened carefully to their reasons for doing so.

"We also heard from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the Plenary Council at our recent assembly of their desire for the Church in Australia to follow NATSICC's lead."

The Plenary Council's agenda called for the Church to "honour and acknowledge the continuing deep spiritual relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to this country and commit ourselves to the ongoing journey of reconciliation".

Among the key recommendations of the Uluru Statement are the establishment of a First Nations "Voice" to the Australian Parliament and a commission to supervise a process of "truth-telling" between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Bishop Macbeth-Green said the bishops acknowledged there remain diverse views within Indigenous communities on the Uluru Statement, but the principles of reconciliation and walking together with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders fit well in the Catholic understanding.

"Sadly, we within the Church have not always lived up to our Gospel calling in our engagement with our Indigenous brother and sisters," he said.

"The endorsement of the Uluru Statement is another step in our journey of addressing those shortcomings, but it will be an ongoing journey with First Peoples.

"Part of that will see us listening to the stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, rather than a tendency to talk about them. That is the model we seek to emulate with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council, and that has brought us to this point."