



## JOINT MEDIA STATEMENT

### 2023 Referendum: Ensuring safety of our local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community

Later this year, all Australians will vote whether to recognise the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament in the Constitution.

We understand that the wider community will have conversations about this, and we welcome informed, respectful and sensitive conversations about a better future for our people.

Irrespective of how individuals in our community choose to vote, the debate in the lead up to the referendum and the outcome will have a profound impact on our people.

The wellbeing of our local Aboriginal community is our primary focus during this time. In recent weeks there have been several verbal racist attacks in public on members of our local community.

The eSafety Commission has recently reported an increase in complaints that centre on material posted online in reference to the referendum that seeks to denigrate, insult, threaten or otherwise abuse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

This public commentary and abuse have a detrimental impact on the social and emotional wellbeing and safety of members of our community.

We write this statement jointly as Aboriginal leaders, to ask our non-Aboriginal friends and broader public to join with us in helping to ensure the safety of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members.

**You have the power to ensure racial violence under the guise of political and social debate is not tolerated.**

If you see or hear behaviour and words that don't sit well with you against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, please stand up and calmly call it out.

Elevate the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in conversations relating to the constitutional recognition and the Voice to Parliament.

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Ensure that conversations you are part of are respectful, informed and not spreading misinformation.

Above all, please remember that the rights, wellbeing and future of our Elders and our families are being discussed.

While non-Aboriginal Australians have a choice to not engage or to walk away from conversations, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people cannot as the debate and the outcome will have a profound impact on our community.

Please walk with us to ensure our community remains safe.

Dallas Widdicombe – *Dharug* – Bendigo District Aboriginal Cooperative CEO

Rodney Carter – *Dja Dja Wurrung and Yorta Yorta* – Dja Dja Wurrung Group CEO

Narlinga Morgan – *Yorta Yorta* – Co-Chair Bendigo NAIDOC Week Committee

Nicola Perry – *Ngarrindjeri* – Co-Chair Reconciliation Committee

ENDS -



L-R: Dallas Widdicombe, Narlinga Morgan, Nicola Perry, Rodney Carter

**For more information, please contact:**

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