

Item 3.2

Progressing the Uluru Statement from the Heart

File No: S051491

Minute by the Lord Mayor

To Council:

On 27 June 2022, Council unanimously reaffirmed its support for the Uluru Statement from the Heart. A month later, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese confirmed that his Government would hold a referendum to enshrine an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice in Australia's Constitution and released the draft question and amendment.

While I am optimistic that the referendum will succeed, I propose that the City shows its support by conducting a campaign to help ensure a high "yes" vote as we did in support of marriage equality during the 2017 same-sex marriage survey.

It is important that progress is made responding to the whole of the Uluru Statement from the Heart including a Makarrata Commission "to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history."

Historical Acceptance is one of the five dimensions of Reconciliation Australia's Five Dimensions of Reconciliation, with the goal of "widespread acceptance of our nation's history and agreement that the wrongs of the past will never be repeated— there is truth, justice, healing and historical acceptance."

The City recognises the importance of truth-telling, and we acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have long called for this. In June 2011, Council amended the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statement in our Corporate Plan to acknowledge that the establishment of a convict outpost on the shores of Warrane (Sydney Harbour) "had far reaching and devastating impacts on the Eora Nation, including the occupation and appropriation of their traditional lands". We also acknowledged that Aboriginal culture endures despite the destructive impact of this invasion and is now globally recognised as one of the world's oldest living cultures.

While the importance of truth-telling is now embedded in the City's plans and policies, there is still more to be done. The First Peoples Dialogue Forum, held as part of our consultations for Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050, identified truth telling initiatives as a "first priority aspiration". Participants suggested this should include "decolonising the city by debunking the myths of Australia and telling the truth". The 2030-2050 Citizens Jury made a similar recommendation.

The City has made great progress in recognising and acknowledging the history, heritage and living culture of First Nations people through the Eora Journey and other actions. We must also be honest in acknowledging the truth of our history:

- through public education and the City's communications;
- in the public domain;
- through the City's symbols and emblems; and

- by promoting an honest conversation about Australia Day.

It is vital that we listen to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, centre their voices in these activities and follow up with action, as we have done in developing the Eora Journey Economic Development Strategy and Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan.

Public Education

The City has produced excellent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and history resources, notably the Barani Barrabugu booklet and walking tour and the Barani website. This work could be expanded to include truth-telling about our shared history using our library system, communications, online resources and talks program.

Public Domain

Over the last 10 years the City has increased the presence and recognition of First Nations culture and heritage in the public domain, addressing an imbalance which has long been skewed towards colonial perspectives. Four of the seven public art projects of the Eora Journey – Recognition in the Public Domain program are now complete, including the major artworks YININMADYEMI: Thou didst let fall in Hyde Park and bara, unveiled earlier this year on the Tarpeian Way. Work is underway on Yananurala, the Harbour Walk, which identifies nine additional projects, currently scheduled to be completed by 2032. Council has committed a total of \$17.4 million to the Eora Journey Recognition in the Public Domain, with \$3 million spent on bara, Yininmadyemi, place projections and Redfern Terrace stage 1.

The remaining Eora Journey public art projects are the Redfern Terrace stage 2 (Living Museum) currently scheduled to be completed between 2022 and 2025, Redfern Tour + Avenue of Hope (2022-2026) and the Eora Journey Harbour to Redfern Walk, (2027-2032).

Many sites on Yananurala and the Eora Journey Harbour to Redfern Walk relate to our shared history while others exclusively reference our colonial past. The two walks provide opportunities for truth-telling and a further rebalancing towards the history, heritage and culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples.

For example, Yananurala includes a major public art project at Ta-ra (Dawes Point) that highlights the site where Patyegarang gifted the language of her people to William Dawes, recording it for future generations in his notebooks.

I propose that the City explore bringing forward elements of these projects to accelerate this rebalancing and enable truth-telling. This could also involve new strategic and imaginative approaches in the public domain which address our colonial history and its exclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.

The City's Symbols and Emblems

The City's symbols and emblems are represented in the Coat of Arms, the Chains of Office and the City Flag each of which are, at the very least, problematic.

The former Coat of Arms include stereotyped depictions of an Aboriginal person and 18th Century Sailor and the motto: "I take but I surrender". The Chains of Office include the Lord Mayoral Chains and Collar and Deputy Lord Mayor collar, which have not been worn since 2019 as they feature the City's former Coat of Arms. The City Flag is based on the City's former Coat of Arms and contains no acknowledgement of First Nations people.

The City's current Coat of Arms, adopted in 1996, features a stylised Rainbow Serpent partially intertwined with a coiled cable representing Sydney's maritime heritage. While this Coat of Arms includes a First Nations acknowledgement, it is uncertain whether the Rainbow Serpent is the most appropriate way to represent the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation.

I propose reviewing the City's symbols and emblems, together with their use and representation, to ensure that they respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and heritage and meet the aspirations of the Uluru Statement of the Heart and the Principles of Reconciliation.

Australia Day

I strongly support changing the date of Australia's national day to one that can be fully embraced and celebrated by all Australians, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Celebrating the current date is difficult and even traumatic for many people within our First Nations communities, as for them it represents Invasion Day and a day of mourning. The dispossession of the First Peoples formally began with the proclamation of British sovereignty over the eastern seaboard of Australia on 26 January 1788.

Not all Australians are ready to recognise this fundamental truth. In his 1968 Boyer Lectures, *After the Dreaming*, the anthropologist W.E.H Stanner referred to the "Great Australian Silence", effectively the near disappearance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives from the Australian story. In the five decades since these lectures, historians, Royal Commissions and our cultural institutions have done much work to end this silence.

Yet there still remain those who complain about "a black armband" approach to history or want to minimise the elements of our shameful past as "mere blemishes".

This should not prevent us engaging in a national conversation about Australia Day. This conversation should be led by National Cabinet, which brings together the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments.

Advocating for a change of date provides a platform for an ongoing honest if painful conversation, not only about 26 January 1788 but all that followed.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart has been described as a generous invitation to all Australians. This is our opportunity to respond to this invitation.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) the Lord Mayor be requested to write to the Prime Minister:
 - (i) commending him on the announcement that his Government will hold a referendum to enshrine an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice in Australia's Constitution during this term of Parliament; and
 - (ii) requesting that he place the matter of changing the date of Australia's national day to one that can be fully embraced and celebrated by all Australians on the agenda of National Cabinet;
- (B) the Chief Executive Officer be requested to, in consultation with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Panel and wider community:
 - (i) investigate options for the City to conduct a campaign in support of the "yes" vote in the proposed constitutional referendum;
 - (ii) investigate opportunities to use our library system, communications, talks programs and other means to advance the truth-telling aspirations of the Uluru Statement of the Heart and Reconciliation Australia;
 - (iii) investigate bringing forward public art projects in the Eora Journey which can further rebalance our public domain in relation to First Nations history, heritage and culture, together with opportunities for new strategic and imaginative approaches in the public domain to enable truth-telling; and
 - (iv) review the content, design and use of the City's symbols and emblems to ensure that they respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and heritage.

COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE

Lord Mayor