



Friday, 9 June 2023
Barunga, Northern Territory

MEDIA RELEASE

2023 Barunga Voice Declaration

The four Northern Territory Aboriginal land councils today signed the Barunga Voice Declaration that addresses all Australians and urges them to support a Voice to Parliament.

More than 200 representatives of the Northern, Central, Tiwi and Anindilyakwa land council are gathered on the traditional lands of the Bagala (Jawoyn) group at Barunga, south-east of Katherine. Land council members signed the Declaration and a copy was then presented to the Minister for Indigenous Australians, the Hon Linda Burney MP.

The 2023 Barunga Voice Declaration calls “for the recognition of our peoples in our still young constitution by enshrining our voice to the parliament and executive government, never to be rendered silent with the stroke of a pen again”.

It invites all Australians to “right the wrongs of the past and deal with the serious issues impacting First Nations peoples...and unite our country”.

Together, the land council members speak with the authority as the elected representatives of tens of thousands of grass roots residents of remote communities, town camps and towns across the Territory.

Quotes from land council chairs

Northern Land Council chair, Samuel Bush-Blanas: “I am very proud the NLC is hosting this historic meeting at Barunga. We are standing strong together as we continue our long struggle. We speak for our clans, communities and our families, asking all Australians to support us and vote ‘Yes’ so we can finally be respected as equals.”

Central Land Council chair, Matthew Palmer: “Most Aboriginal people, not just here in the Territory, want a voice to power. Please don’t let the nay-sayers in Canberra confuse you and support us by voting ‘yes’.”

Anindilyakwa deputy chair, Thomas Amagula: “The call for constitutional recognition and a voice to parliament is about respect and coming together as a country to build a future we can all be proud of. This is what those old leaders started back in 1988 and we stand here today to carry on the spirit of their legacy.”

Tiwi Land Council chair, Gibson Farmer Illortaminni: “Through the proposed referendum and the establishment of a voice to parliament, we, the Tiwi people, want to be at the table when decisions are made that affect our land, culture, and future. I urge all Australians to join us in embracing this opportunity for positive change and vote ‘Yes’ to ensure our voices are heard and respected when important decisions are being made that affect us.”



The Declaration honours past leaders and the 1988 Barunga Statement that called for the recognition of Aboriginal rights and culture, that was presented to former prime minister Bob Hawke by NLC chair Yunupingu and CLC chair Wenten Rubuntja 35 years ago.

The Barunga Declaration

We, members of the four Northern Territory Aboriginal land councils, acknowledging our elders and old people, have gathered again at Barunga, the site of the historic Barunga Statement in 1988 and the Barunga Agreement in 2018, with pride in our own laws, cultures and ceremonies, looking to the future.

We, who have been dispossessed and subjected to punitive controls by governments, who have never ceded sovereignty over our lands and waters, resolve with one heart our determined support for the implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart in full.

We must right the wrongs of the past and deal with the serious issues impacting First Nations peoples, empower First Nations peoples and unite our country.

We call for the recognition of First Nations peoples in our still young constitution by enshrining our voice to the parliament and executive government, never to be rendered silent with the stroke of a pen again.

We need to be heard and urge our fellow Australians to stand with us and vote 'yes' in the forthcoming referendum, for the sake of a better future for all of us.

The declaration pays homage to the original Barunga Statement design and honours the cultural leaders who created it in 1988 (listed below), including sole survivor, pre-eminent artist Mr Djambawa Marawilli AM

1988 Barunga Statement artwork created by:

Yunupingu AM, 1948-2023, Gumatj
M Marawili, c.1937-2018, Madarrpa
B Marawili, 1944-2002, Madarrpa
D Marawili AM, 1953, Madarrpa
D Ngurruwuthun, 1936-2001, Munyuku
D Ngurruwuthun, c. 1940-2001, Munyuku
W Rubuntja AM, c. 1926-2005, Arrernte
L Turner Jampijinpa, 1951-2009, Warlpiri
D Williams Japanangka, 1948-2013, Warlpiri