

Writing...

IN SUPPORT OF A VOICE

By Alaina Dean

I don't willingly consume media from "mainstream" news outlets – I don't watch the news on TV, I turn the radio off, and the only part of the newspaper I read is the Good Weekend quiz. This is a far cry from how I grew up (in a newsagency devouring the newspapers, watching the local news on the TV over dinner, listening to the radio on the drive to school). When I started to realise the control one man has over Australia's news, I stepped away. I began making deliberate choices as to where I was getting my news, and consistently questioning the stance of the people who were writing the news I was consuming.

It's not a perfect approach. Any time you're refusing to consider the people who steadfastly hold the opposite views to you, you risk creating an echo chamber. I was living in an echo chamber when the gay marriage plebiscite was announced, with my friends I'd met at uni confident the Yes vote would prevail without much of a struggle. But I was shaking my head – where I grew up people openly voiced their anger about marriage being *stolen* from them just like the rainbow and the word gay had been before that. By seeking out people who held the same views as me, I had created a circle of people around me who couldn't even consider the No vote coming out on top – that there were people in our country who would proudly vote no to equality.

I still have that circle of friends, and I still have that echo chamber, but I am now living back where I grew up, and the media has seeped in – the TV is on in the background, the

radio is on when I get out of bed, I flick through the newspapers as I eat my breakfast on a Sunday. I hadn't really noticed the way it was shaping my thoughts until I caught myself thinking I didn't know anything about the Voice to Parliament.

So, I marched into town and bought The Voice to Parliament Handbook, written by Indigenous leader Thomas Mayo & Kerry O'Brien. I read it in the food court. And I shook my head – of course there is information on the Voice. Of course, it is easily accessible.

The Handbook includes information on the creation of the Uluru Statement of the Heart, the history of struggle for an effective Voice, information on the mechanisms of a referendum, frequently asked questions, and how the reader can help the Yes vote campaign. It's a comprehensive, clear and simple guide providing all the detail we'll need to make an informed decision in the referendum.

As a white person living on stolen land, I am always conscious of my voice drowning out the voices of Indigenous people, as white voices have done on this continent since colonisation. Maybe this contributed to my shameful lack of knowledge prior to seeking out the Handbook – I was of course going to vote Yes, so I didn't need more information as it wasn't my place to educate on the Voice. But this is not a time to stay silent. It is a time to use our voices to amplify the voices of Indigenous peoples.

At the end of the Handbook, Mayo lays out what we can do to help. He states that our role needs go beyond just voting Yes – we “need to work as hard as Indigenous peoples did to create this once-in-generations opportunity”. For me, that looks like equipping myself with the knowledge to have effective conversations about the Voice to Parliament, to be able to recognise and call out the blatant biases in the media, and to not leave Indigenous peoples to solely educate the rest of Australia on the importance of this referendum.

We saw during the gay marriage postal vote that having your whole country discuss and debate your very existence can be extremely damaging and distressing to the individual and the community. It's no different now. The discussions of the Voice to Parliament in the media can be harmful and hard to bear – we can't leave the grunt work of this last stretch to the people fighting to have their voices enshrined in the Australian constitution. So, if you haven't already, it's time to buy or borrow the Handbook, and start having the conversations needed for Australia to support this “movement of the Australian people for a better future”.

The Voice to Parliament Handbook, All the Detail You Need is by Thomas Mayo and Kerry O'Brien, with illustrations by Cathy Wilcox. It's available pretty much everywhere you buy books.

Alaina Dean grew up on unceded Wiradjuri Country in the Central West of New South Wales. She acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community, and pays respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.