

**By Michael McMahon**

---

How can you speak your truth if no one is listening?

For too long Australia has turned away as Mob have spoken. The first I saw of closing the gap was posters around my primary school – offered as a loose collection of ideas, promises and commitments without much explanation. In the many years that have followed, the gap has widened and this loose collection of ideas, promises and commitments, unified in vagueness, has remained. In policy, in community and in our built and grown environment, systems that were introduced to bridge these gaps have failed at great social, cultural and financial cost.

The Voice to Parliament is the first step on a path to truth. Providing the opportunity for a greater level of political assurance will be significant – currently, there are no political or legal assurances, and responses to truth are agonizingly slow, and actions even slower. When Australia commemorated the 32nd anniversary of the truth-seeking Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in April this year more than 120 of its recommendations had still to be implemented and 455 more Indigenous lives had been lost.

The voice has the potential to create a space in which we can speak, hear each other and be listened to. To me the voice is about reciprocity, treating the generous act of speaking with the respectful act of listening. Deep, unconditional listening.

The Voice and Treaty will ensure that when truths are sought the response can be appropriate and timely, importantly

informed by those with lived experience and the knowledge of why, how and when to act. The Voice will give Indigenous people the opportunity to speak to injustices, tragedy, massacres and land rights struggles. When Australia hears these wrongs expressed then, as a nation, we can act to offer support, rectification, reparation – to mourn. It could help the broader population to gain empathy for our history and stories and make elders and knowledge holders – my family – feel safe.

Equally there's great potential for celebration, for positive action by animating our narratives of design, suffrage, sexuality, migration, music, transport, political economy, foreign policy, and family. The power of the Voice to ensure traditions and histories of our people are maintained, elevated and honoured is real. This is an exciting, positive possibility.

For me the Voice is necessarily political, while Treaty is about the law and truth is about history. I am hopeful, idealistic and cautious. I return to the The Uluru Statement from the Heart for guidance – it speaks of redressing the power imbalance, of empowerment and rightfulness, of our culture being a gift. My wish is that the Voice will see the creation of spaces that validate Indigenous People's truth, evidence of being listened to.