




Speech By
Hon. Leanne Enoch

MEMBER FOR ALGESTER

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ADJOURNMENT

Voice to Parliament

 **Hon. LM ENOCH** (Algester—ALP) (Minister for Treaty, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Minister for Communities and Minister for the Arts) (7.04 pm): The year before I was born, Quandamooka woman Oodgeroo Noonuccal was a key campaigner in a once-in-a-generation opportunity, the 1967 referendum, which urged two very modest alterations to the Constitution. They were alterations that ensured First Australians were included in the national census for the first time since Federation and provided the ability for the Commonwealth parliament to make special laws pertaining to First Peoples of this country wherever they may live should the Commonwealth parliament see fit.

History tells us that over 90 per cent of voters voted in favour, which made it the highest yes vote ever recorded in a federal referendum. Sadly, history also shows us that Commonwealth governments of all persuasions since and with varying levels of goodwill have made less than satisfactory progress on the appalling gap that exists between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

In the time since that referendum, there have been numerous commissions of inquiries, reviews and reports brought about by the unacceptable treatment and marked disadvantage being experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across the nation, all recommending in one way or another the need for a First Peoples voice to help shape the policy and program responses needed to make change. Since that referendum, Commonwealth governments of all persuasions have stood up and/or abandoned several representative bodies through which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians were formally involved in the processes of government affecting their lives: ATSIC, the national Indigenous council and the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples. Consequently, the unacceptable levels of disadvantage have persisted.

This year as we prepare for this once-in-a-generation opportunity, a referendum that seeks to end this sad, sorry cycle and enshrine a body in our Constitution that cannot be abandoned by government, I cannot help thinking about the late Oodgeroo Noonuccal, my Aunty Kath Walker, and the many Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who campaigned so hard in 1967 to begin the journey toward a fairer Australia. I think about their sense of generational responsibility, how each generation faces their challenges seeking to make things better for the next. I think about the conviction they maintained with every conversation, some of which I am sure would have been just as challenging as those we are having today.

I recently attended an information session about the referendum with community leader Noel Pearson in my electorate of Algester at the Belong community centre. Not all participants were in absolute agreement, but I am sure all understood that this is a significant moment in time, in the same way it was in 1967. Leading into this session I spoke with Yuval, a local volunteer at the community centre, who was deeply passionate about building better opportunities for people across the community. He is embarking on respectful conversations with his family, friends and neighbours to help dispel myths

and support a yes vote, the same way that Oodgeroo Noonuccal did in 1967 and the same way that I am and that many other Australians are this year. We on this side of the House support Voice, treaty and truth.