

Self Determination & Representation

AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS ACTION PLAN SELF DETERMINATION & REPRESENTATION INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Over two centuries of colonisation has seen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples subjected to widespread dispossession of lands, territories and resources, destruction of their lives, families, cultures and economies, and ongoing discrimination, exclusion and marginalisation.

“We believe that self-determination for Indigenous people is a vital and essential step.”

Senator Andrew Bartlett
Spokesperson on
Indigenous Affairs

Commonwealth and State laws and practices effectively denied Indigenous Australians adequate rights and protection. Australia's Indigenous peoples are not only marginalised, they are also politically disenfranchised and many are entrenched in poverty.

Successive governments and all political parties have failed to give sufficient priority to the issues affecting and views of Indigenous people, despite the scandalous levels of inequality and disadvantage they endure. Over the last 10 years, there has been a systematic dismantling of incentives, programs and organisations dedicated to advancing the cause of Indigenous people and a continued resistance by the Federal Government to formally apologising for and recognising past injustices.

In recent times, Indigenous representation and voices have been further silenced with the total abolition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), ignoring the findings of a comprehensive review which recommended reform, not destruction. This has been followed by sweeping changes to federal government department responsibilities, which has seen Indigenous services and policy "mainstreamed" back in to the federal government bureaucracy.

In Queensland, the recent absorption of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy department into Community Services also signals a lack of specific attention being given to the views and unique needs of Indigenous people.

While accepting that some changes need to be made, the practical consequences of these and other changes are a major concern. The lack of indigenous representation and the absence of indigenous voices from public debates are a serious concern which is repeatedly raised by Indigenous people in urban and remote communities.

Lack of certainty over funding and poor coordination of different programs has seen some communities in a more difficult situation than were they were 10 years ago, with weaker organizational representation making it more difficult to ensure their local views, needs and issues are properly considered.

On the 40th anniversary of the 1967 referendum and in the face of continuing inequality of opportunity for many Indigenous people, it is vital that much greater



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priority and intensity is given to Indigenous issues by all political parties. There is a need for much more positive support and engagement with Indigenous Australians by our political systems, including developing and supporting a wider range of Indigenous leaders and voices.

The Democrats believe that self-determination for Indigenous people is still an important and essential principle which has still yet to be properly pursued in Australia. It is essential that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have greater control over their own futures as they seek to keep their identities, cultures and traditions alive, while having access to the same opportunities and services as all other Australian citizens.

Action Agenda

Effective representative organisations for Indigenous Australians must be established at national and regional level to allow Indigenous people to have better engagement with and involvement in government decision making at all levels. The precise structure of these bodies should be determined after full consultation with Indigenous people.

The Australian government should support the adoption and implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.



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