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The Voice and Keating's Redfern speech three decades later

On the 30th anniversary of former Prime Minister Paul Keating's historic Redfern Speech, First Nations Australians are still waiting for the vision it articulated to be realised.

Keating's speech was a watershed moment in the sorry history of Indigenous reconciliation.

Never before, and only once or twice since, has the leader of our Nation so clearly spelt out the history and the future opportunities of Indigenous reconciliation.

Never before had the impact of the colonial takeover of Indigenous lands, alcohol, disposition and disease been so vividly articulated by our national leader as when Keating asked Australia to "imagine if it were you...".

Keating, in a clear strong voice admitted "we committed the murders", "we took the lands", "we brought the diseases" and "we took the children".

Keating's assertion of the collective responsibility of the present generations for the outrages of the past rings just as true now as it did 30 years ago.

And yet as a nation we still anguish over even the smallest steps towards a just reconciliation and a better future Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

Every step along the way, voices opposed to change rise in opposition signalling the social decay each reform will bring.


Same sex marriage, now five years since the plebiscite, hasn't destroy the institution of marriage or seen the demise of Mother's Day as claimed by many.

Native title laws back in the late 1990s were predicted by John Howard to herald in veto laws over three quarters of Australia's land mass and a targeted attack on suburban back yards, hasn't happened.

Now we have the same, disingenuous, and tired arguments being made against the Voice; it will be a third chamber, it will dictate Government policy, it will divide the country and lead to dissent.

The rhetoric is loud and ill-informed and flies in the face of the tag line we all love to label our country with, 'a fair go for all'.

The Voice is just the next step in a slow and difficult path towards Reconciliation.



It is no threat to our democracy; it is not a threat to our country, and it is not a threat to us as individuals.

As Keating said back in 1992 ‘I believe that the great things about Australian social democracy reflect a fundamental belief in justice’.

While the challenge of reconciliation has been a test for many Prime Ministers, across all political persuasions, since Keating now and in the lead up to next year’s referendum the challenge for all will be to unite the country behind the Voice and to take the next step towards a fair go for all.

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This piece appeared on the [Pearls and Irritations](#) blog site on 16 December 2022

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