

Dear Friends in Christ,

When I am asked how Catholics should vote in the Referendum to be held on 14 October, my answer is “conscientiously.” I do not believe that bishops should, in our democracy, direct their people to vote one way or another in any election.

However, it is our duty to remind Catholics to take their responsibilities as voters seriously; and to help them inform and form their consciences. Whether you vote “yes” or “no” in the coming Referendum, it is important that you know what you are doing. Let your *yes* be a carefully considered *yes*, or your *no* be a carefully considered *no*. To think “I don’t know enough, and can’t be bothered finding out” is not a responsible option.

This year, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, in collaboration with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (NATSICC), published a statement entitled “Listen, Learn, Love”, about past issues and those we continue to deal with in the relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. I encourage you to read it at <https://socialjustice.catholic.org.au/2023/08/22/social-justice-statement-2023-24/>.

I also encourage you to read the 2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart (<https://ulurustatement.org/the-statement/view-the-statement/>) which sets out concisely and eloquently the aspirations for truth-telling, treaties and a voice. The Australian bishops, after listening to NATSICC, the voice we set up three decades ago to advise us, endorsed the Uluru statement more than two years ago. Last year, it was also endorsed by the Plenary Council.

Whichever decision you come to, whatever the result of the Referendum, I would ask you to respect those who take a different view. And I would hope that all of us, whichever way we vote, whatever the outcome, would recommit to healing the wounds of dispossession which have been passed on from generation to generation.

+Michael McKenna
Bishop of Bathurst