

NEWSFEED



Freedom of speech in a modern day democracy



University students throughout Australia have been challenged by the Speaker of the House of Representatives in a competition designed to raise awareness of the House among young Australians.

The Speaker's University Challenge encourages students to voice their opinions during a three minute video on a topic chosen by Speaker, the Hon Bronwyn Bishop (Mackellar, NSW).

Last year's challenge, titled "Freedom of speech in a modern day democracy", was won by Patrisha Kay from Griffith University, and first prize included a trip to Canberra to meet her challenger.

Ms Kay argued that there is no real freedom of speech because there are so many restrictions, from defamation to discrimination.

"We are constantly thinking whether our words will be misconstrued, but in this age of mass social media, we aren't really listened to anyway," she said.

Entries were judged upon well-constructed arguments that engage the audience, original and creative ideas and presentation, and demonstrated use of evidence and research. ■

Possible referendum on Constitutional recognition of Aboriginal people



The committee recommended that the House of Representatives and the Senate should each allocate a full day of parliamentary sittings to debate concurrently the three options.

Based on the written submissions and public hearings so far, the committee is convinced of the

benefits of recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Constitution.

Community support for the constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is on the rise. According to the progress report of the Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, community support grew between August 2013 and August 2014.

However, the report showed awareness of the proposed referendum on constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples fell from 42 per cent to 34 per cent during the same period.

It showed that a successful referendum proposal would need to meet three primary objectives:

- recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first peoples of Australia;
- preserve the Commonwealth's power to make laws with respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; and
- in making laws under such a power, prevent the Commonwealth from discriminating against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Committee Chair, Ken Wyatt (Hasluck, WA), said that action is needed to focus the nation's attention on, and build momentum towards, what would be a significant change to our founding document.

"A 'circuit breaker' should be rapidly identified to settle the final form of words, and draw debate on the model to a conclusion. This will build a sense of national urgency and provide renewed certainty that the country will proceed to a referendum," said Mr Wyatt.

"Ultimately, a referendum proposal must take the form of a Bill submitted to Parliament, and that Bill must be passed by an absolute majority in both houses. It is imperative that the wording of that Bill be capable of achieving near unanimous parliamentary support." ■

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