Why Professor Megan Davis Challenges You to Stop Being an Ally

She asks you to own the Constitution, the record, and the vote

A reflection by Philippe Foubert, PhD

Read online: philippefoubert.com/writings/stop-being-an-ally.html

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"If justice depends upon Aboriginal people having allies, what does that tell us about where power still resides?" Professor Megan Davis put that question to a hall of allies at the National Allyship Summit on 18 September 2026, and she told them she agreed that "the word is wrong."[1]

As I read her, the word "ally" describes a division of labour that lost the referendum of 2023: First Nations people make the case, and non-Indigenous voters decide it.

I watched her address online. The program at UNSW had billed her to "offer a provocation on the future of allyship and the role allies can play in advancing justice and reform."[1] She delivered one.

Ten days later I joined an online discussion that followed up the summit. By then her provocation had narrowed to a question of vocabulary. Must we use a different word now? Are we colleagues? Partners? Why can we no longer be allies, when we are making progress?

Davis had raised the vocabulary herself. She listed the words in circulation, accomplice, co-struggle, co-conspirator, comrade, and friend, said "I don't know if that's the right one," and left the choice to the afternoon's discussion. In the same breath she gave what she called "the big takeaway": "the problem with ally is it suggests we're separate, but we're actually deeply connected."[1]

The follow-up discussion took up her question and left her answer behind. Davis spoke to the Australian people as one body, and she traced the word's failure to the separation it assumes. A new word leaves that separation in place unless our conduct changes with it: *we* are here, *they* are there, and only the name of the gap remains in dispute.

She had already explained what that separation cost. In 2025, asked what went wrong at the referendum, she named a decision: “Unlike Turnbull and Gillard, Albanese wouldn’t allow us to have non-Indigenous Australians on the committees with us. So it looked like it was a separatist Black issue, and it wasn’t. It was a nation-building one.”[2] The referendum machinery put First Nations people out in front and everyone else behind them. Two First Nations people, Senator Jacinta Nampijinpa Price and Nyunggai Warren Mundine, fronted the No case[3] against a Statement drawn from thirteen Regional Dialogues with more than 1,200 First Nations delegates.[4] To many voters the contest looked like a quarrel among Aboriginal people.

If the ally goes, what remains for non-Indigenous Australians to do? They keep the Constitution, and with it the obligation to complete the nation’s constitutional founding: to settle, in the Constitution, the relationship between the First Nations and the Australian people on the terms the Uluru Statement proposes. That obligation concerns the institutions of the state. It leaves First Nations sovereignty and Country untouched.

I read her challenge as a demand that non-Indigenous Australians take responsibility for changing the institutions through which they already exercise power. That reading asks four things of those of us who are non-Indigenous. We need to know our own Constitution well enough to explain it. We need to tell the truth about the history our own side made, starting with the records our councils and churches still hold. We need to make the Uluru Statement a condition of any future republic. And we need to organise where we live, and persuade the neighbours who voted No, a task left to First Nations advocates in 2023.

I. Only the voters can change the Constitution

Davis’s case for the reforms rests on one constitutional premise, and her challenge to the ally follows from it. Under section 128, Parliament proposes an alteration and the electors decide it, by a national majority and a majority of voters in at least four of the six states.[5] Lawyers call the body that can make and remake a constitution the constituent power. In Australia that body is the people voting at a referendum.

In plain terms, only the voters can change the Constitution, acting together at a referendum, and that includes every one of us. The Uluru Statement therefore addressed the voters, and asked of them the one thing only they can do. The

reforms address a defect in that founding document: it still contains clauses about race, and its drafters never sought First Nations consent.

Constitutional reform repairs a foundation on which every voter stands, so no voter can help with it from outside. "Ally" names the outsider's place, however hard the ally works.

Davis reached this position long before 2026. Her argument runs back at least eight years, and at every point she addresses the same body: the Australian people.

2018: the people hold the amendment power. In her Henry Parkes Oration, Davis explained why the Uluru Statement went to the public: "We deliberately issued the Uluru Statement to the Australian people, because it is we who can change the Constitution." More pointedly: "The amendment mechanism placed into the Constitution was for us."[6] Non-Indigenous voters therefore hold the numbers that decide constitutional reform, and reform becomes law only with their votes.

2018: two polities. The same oration pairs a Voice to Parliament with an Australian head of state as "inextricably linked proposals for reform and recognition for two polities in our country: the First Nations of Australia and the Australian people."[6] Each polity has its own reform, and each reform completes the other.

The parties to the relationship she describes are peoples, and allyship is an ethic for persons. An ally is the wrong kind of party to a relationship between peoples, whatever attitude the ally brings.

First Nations people belong to both polities. They vote as Australians, and they belong to distinct peoples whose collective rights shared citizenship leaves untouched.

2023: reconciliation as a private substitute for structural change. After the referendum she wrote that "the Australian homemade brand of reconciliation is pure Howard-era DNA," that it "exists in a time warp," and that two decades of it "has asked nothing of the state other than the commitment of taxpayer monies to fund private reconciliation activities." Drawing on the American scholar Charlotte Lloyd, she concluded that reconciliation leaves Australians "ill equipped to understand … Indigenous aspirations for social change that would have to be driven by structural political reform rather than by voluntary gestures from private individuals."[7]

She told the *Australian Financial Review* the same month that "reconciliation is dead."[8] Her essay in *The Monthly* also describes the Uluru Statement as "the offer of friendship" and "the olive branch," and the 6.2 million who accepted it as "a movement of the Australian people," in which "we the people believe in recognition and rights."[7]

Reconciliation failed, on this account, because it dissolved the Australian people into individuals and handed each of them a voluntary task.

2024: an Australian issue. In her University of Queensland NAIDOC lecture: "If we can cultivate this sense of Belonging, then this isn't a First Nations issue, this is an Australian issue. This is an issue for all of us." Full belonging, she said, "confers a right of full standing, rather than conditional or partial standing."[9]

2025: the ally re-tasked. Two years after the referendum, in an interview alongside Aunty Pat Anderson, she named the failure and the remedy. "We had no non-Indigenous faces standing next to us. It looked like it was just a singular Aboriginal thing when in fact it was meant to be an Aussie thing."

Then, in remarks the interview prints with its own ellipses: "We don't even see them as allies. We can't do this separately to them … They need to be walking next to us, not behind us … We want their active input because it's their democracy and it's our democracy."

And on what the movement was always meant to be: "The whole idea was working with Aussies across 151 electorates, actually going and talking to them. They would build the movement because it needs to be us together."[2]

Together, the remarks remove the ally in one breath and supply the replacement in the next: the Australian people, building the movement themselves, seat by seat.

2026: whose Constitution is it? On 26 May 2026 she delivered the Federation University Annual Reconciliation Lecture, "Beyond Reconciliation: What the Referendum Revealed," at The Edge, Federation Square, Melbourne.[10] Oxfam's published summary records that she took the argument past the administration of Indigenous policy to constitutional belonging: for whom the Constitution exists, and whom it still excludes.

2026: the summit. At the summit she drew on the American scholar john a. powell, whose work on othering and belonging her team has studied since the

referendum.[11] Allyship, she said, "begins with the existence of two categories," those whose struggle it is and "the outsiders who elect to support them. The ally can therefore enter and leave the relationship whenever they want." Belonging asks a different question: "What relationship do we already have to one another, and what obligations follow from it?" She named the frame that question opens, "citizenship and political obligation," and asked why addressing "dispossession, unequal state power, incarceration, child removal" should "require non-Indigenous Australians to acquire the special moral identity of ally at all." Her answer: "These can be understood as questions about what Australian institutions owe Aboriginal people and what citizens owe each other. That moves the discussion away from benevolence."[1]

The summit address concluded a long argument, and she delivered it at a summit that Allies for Uluru convened: allies invited her, and she told them that their word for themselves misdescribes the relationship. She also told the summit that powell will join its next gathering, in April or May 2027, and that a new series of Dialogues will run the same year.[1]

II. What the word "ally" assumes

"Ally" can describe a serious commitment. Many who use the word look to First Nations for direction or guidance, organise, and work for changes in law, and I honour their work. Davis herself rejected one standard complaint, that buying a book counts as performative activism: "buy as many books as you want." She prefaced her survey of the criticisms with "I don't necessarily agree with all these."[1] She did agree that the word is wrong, and the reason lies in what it assumes.

The word so often assumes voluntary assistance to a cause that belongs to someone else. Call that conception allyship as help. It is the target of Davis's challenge, and the only target. Under it, goodwill sets both the extent of the commitment and the date it ends.

"Ally" confers a moral position, the good side of the line, and sets the terms of engagement as generous and bounded. An ally gives time, money, and attention on their own schedule, and withdraws at will, free of any duty. Reconciliation rested on the same foundation for twenty years, through Reconciliation Action Plans, Acknowledgements of Country, and NAIDOC morning teas.

Davis credits the plans with one change. Under the revised framework, she told the summit, the top-tier plans encourage organisations "to engage the state on rights and change," and that shift allowed some large organisations to support the Uluru Statement.[1] A plan that points an organisation at the state serves the reform; a ritual that stands in for the state stalls it.

Davis has put the point to a festival crowd as well as to a summit. Writing on Garma in 2025, she quoted Denise Bowden of the Yothu Yindi Foundation to the attendees: "Don't be fooled by the beauty of Garma … Don't think your attendance here is enough."[12]

Davis objects to the design of these rituals: they leave the constitutional order untouched while making everyone feel they have settled the matter.

The barbecues and casseroles of the Yes campaign, which Davis thanks in her post-referendum essay, differed. They sustained a movement, whereas the morning teas stood in for the state.[7]

Allyship as help rebrands reconciliation's arrangement for progressives. It keeps the individual as the unit of action, keeps the action revocable, and adds a commandment reconciliation never had: step back, centre Indigenous voices, and follow.

Several causes combined to defeat the referendum. Davis's own explanation of the "separatist" look points at the committee structure, and her 2024 lecture names "a cocktail of negative influences: racism, politicisation, disinformation, and let's not forget plain old inertia and fear of change."[9] But the posture allyship prescribes, standing behind, matched the picture the referendum machinery produced.

When respect for First Nations leadership becomes a reason for political reticence, it leaves First Nations people making an argument the whole country needs to make. In 2023 that reticence left them alone at the front. Anyone who hears her provocation as a complaint that allies did too little misses the harder point: the ally's defining virtue, deference, kept non-Indigenous faces away from the front when the reform most needed them there.

Her 2026 lecture, as Oxfam summarises it, describes how Indigenous rights shrink in policy and administration: they become programs to deliver, and constitutional belonging drops from view.[10] Allyship as help belongs to the same world of service and delivery, alongside Closing the Gap. It answers a question about standing as if it were a question about delivery. Service can

implement structural change, but only the people decide whether the structure changes. The ally and the program officer are cousins: both answer a constitutional question in the administrative voice.

Her own spatial language makes the point. “Behind us” is the ally’s posture: deference, following, amplifying. She replaces it with “next to,” the posture of co-owners.

The test, then, whatever word we use, is **whose problem we take the Constitution’s defect to be.** If the honest answer is “theirs, and I am helping,” the ally survives under any name. The same test applies to “citizen.” Citizens can stay paternalistic or idle, and the word earns its place only if it changes what we undertake and sustain. Help, however generous, leaves unspoken the duties we already have.

III. Belonging leaves First Nations sovereignty intact

Some will read her call for belonging as a call to fold First Nations into a common citizenship. Her own words exclude that reading. She reminds readers that “First Nations are collectives, not individuals.”[13] The Uluru Statement affirms a sovereignty that “has never been ceded or extinguished, and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown.”[14] Voice, Treaty, and Truth all presuppose a standing difference. So does Makarrata, “the coming together after a struggle,” in which, as Davis reports Galarrwuy Yunupingu saying of Uluru, the aggrieved party has called out the party they allege has done them wrong.[15]

The argument removes one thing: the ally’s distance from the defect in the founding documents. Allyship blurs three roles, and each belongs to someone different.

The defect belongs to everyone. A Constitution that still lets Parliament make laws for “the people of any race” under section 51(xxvi), and still contemplates states disqualifying a race from voting under section 25, belongs to every citizen under it.[5] Davis dates the ownership: Australia “can no longer point to the 1890s drafters and say that the racism imbued in our constitutional order is the legacy of ‘old, white, rich, dead men’. Modern Australia owned that on October 14, 2023.”[7]

The design of the remedy belongs to First Nations. The colonial delegates who drafted the Constitution never sought First Nations consent,

and a remedy the majority wrote alone would repeat that defect. The Regional Dialogues and the national convention at Uluru authored Voice, Treaty, and Truth, and Davis has spent a decade refusing non-Indigenous redesign of that content, whether a preamble, a minimalist recognition, or legislation offered as a substitute for constitutional change.

The enactment belongs to the people. Section 128 gives the power to change the Constitution to the electors alone; treaties, commissions, and a legislated Voice run through parliaments and governments that the same people elect.

Allyship as help misplaces all three roles. It treats the problem as theirs, the remedy as something I may assist, and the outcome as something I hope for on their behalf.

Role	Whose?	What it means
The defect	Everyone's	The race power and section 25 bind every citizen under the Constitution
The design	First Nations'	Voice, Treaty, and Truth, as the Regional Dialogues and the convention at Uluru set them out
The enactment	The people's	Only voters can change the Constitution, under section 128

A people can remain distinct and still join a common founding. The founders of 1901 did so: the Constitution's preamble records that the people of separate colonies "agreed to unite in one indissoluble Federal Commonwealth."[5] Queensland endured, and Australians comfortably call themselves both Queenslanders and Australians. The flaw of 1901 lay in whom the compact excluded. The Uluru Statement asks the country to complete its founding on terms the First Nations have set.

The division binds both sides. What First Nations have decided they want outranks any plan, campaign, or group the majority builds. Non-Indigenous Australians must also respect continuing First Nations deliberation, which forbids freezing the agenda at one moment in 2017 or picking whichever Indigenous opinion confirms a view already held. Some questions of authority remain open: who sets priorities as circumstances change, and who speaks for a community.

Authority over a people's aspirations and representation differs from the drafting of every law, treaty, or program that implements them. Governments and First Nations negotiate treaties, and Davis asks for non-Indigenous "active input." Respect for First Nations leadership therefore leaves non-Indigenous Australians two jobs of their own: persuading their own communities and reforming the institutions they sustain. A non-Indigenous group that takes up either job must say whose views it represents, how it sets its priorities, and how it will hear complaint about its conduct.

The words she reaches for in place of "ally" confirm the division. Writing after the referendum of the 6.2 million who voted Yes, she called them "six million Australian brothers and sisters who walk with us," "six million confirmed friends that we never knew we had," and "we six million … bonded together now."[7] She said it of the Yes voters, the part of the people that had already acted. I read her words as an invitation to understand the relationship as enduring and binding. An ally adopts a role and may drop it. Brothers and sisters remain so after the argument. Her question at the summit, what relationship we already have to one another, asks for exactly that: a bond we already have, in place of a role we choose.

IV. The majority must limit its own power

Followed to its end, Davis's argument asks something allyship programs rarely ask. It asks the majority to **limit its own power, durably and by law.**

The Voice was such a limit, although a modest one. The proposed section 129 would have secured the existence of a body able to make representations to Parliament and the Executive Government. It had no veto and imposed no explicit general duty to consult it before every decision, and the Constitution itself would have remained alterable under section 128. Its hard guarantees were existence and a voice: no ordinary Act could abolish the body or strip its right to make representations.[16]

The majority had to surrender only one thing: the power to silence the body by simple majority when it became inconvenient. The majority refused. The modesty of the ask measures the size of the refusal.

The refusal now has a cost. In August 2025 the government made Indigenous "economic empowerment" its flagship policy at Garma, and Davis's verdict on it names the missing institution: "The opacity of economic empowerment

policy is a consequence of there being no representative Voice. The status quo has supercharged the one thing the Voice was designed to mitigate – elite capture." The government, she wrote, "has doubled down on the very dynamics the Voice sought to disrupt," and she cited Michael Dillon, who once ran the federal portfolio: "Picking winners is fine until you begin picking losers."[12]

Without the body it refused, the majority's government now selects which First Nations interests prosper, and escapes accountability for that selection. The Uluru Statement from the Heart names that condition in its own words: "the torment of our powerlessness."[14]

Treaties also bind the majority. Victoria's Statewide Treaty, in force since 12 December 2025, shows that a government can accept that constraint within its own jurisdiction and on the terms of its own agreement.[17] Truth commissions with real powers bind it too. Davis said after the referendum that the No "doesn't mean a legislative Voice is off the table," and that voters "didn't Vote No to Truth-Telling. They didn't Vote No to Agreement Making."[9] Each of these can proceed now; judge each by the authority and the accountability it establishes.

Reinventing the country therefore means agreeing to institutions that constrain the majority itself. A better Australia that others design on First Nations people's behalf would repeat the old arrangement with better intentions. The commitment becomes real when we support an institution's authority on the day its intervention is inconvenient, costly, or critical of us.

Here the difference between ally and citizen shows. The ally gives revocable goodwill; the citizen gives up some unchecked majority power, in a form built to outlast enthusiasm. That is harder to offer than a new word, which is why the conversation keeps returning to words.

V. Every citizen shares the duty, however recently arrived

Davis's co-keynote at the summit was George Megalogenis, speaking on "Australia's changing population."[1] The pairing suited her argument, because the non-Indigenous Australian is increasingly a migrant or the child of migrants. At the 2021 Census, 27.6 per cent of Australians were born overseas, and 48.2 per cent had at least one parent born overseas.[18]

Much allyship language leans on inherited guilt and personal atonement, which says little to people whose families arrived in 1995. Davis's framework fits them. On the day they became citizens, they inherited the Constitution and a share of the power in section 128. A resident without a vote still acts through a workplace, an association, or a local campaign. Their civic obligation rests on the same ground as a sixth-generation grazier's, membership of the polity, though their particular duties may differ. It rests on present membership alone, apart from any claim of ancestral guilt.

Davis told the summit that the paid communications research behind the Statement found Australians drawn to it "because of belonging": it "allowed them to belong in a country that they felt they might not belong," and it brought together "the two identities, First Nations and Australians."[1] A family that arrived in 1995 knows that feeling, and the Statement's offer of belonging speaks to it directly.

An argument grounded in citizenship can reach Australians the reconciliation model never reached, and it speaks to the Australian people as one body, as her whole argument does.

VI. What the Australian people owe

Asked what replaces the ally, most writing on allyship answers with a better individual: better informed, more active, more willing. But Davis addressed the people as a whole. Reconciliation failed, on her account, because it converted the Australian people into a crowd of well-meaning persons, each with a private task. A list of private virtues, however demanding, repeats the conversion. The citizen who replaces the ally belongs to a constituent power.

Once we see ourselves among the people who can alter the Constitution, our obligations stop being favours and become duties. Those duties arise from more than power. They arise from the injustice and from our present relationship to the institutions that sustain it. We vote under a Constitution that keeps the race power, hold titles that run back through dispossession, and elect the parliaments that decide what a Voice or a treaty may do. A person who takes part in an arrangement that wrongs others, and who has a share of the power to change it, owes a contribution to changing it, measured by that power and by the opportunities at hand.

Her premise leads me to four obligations. Each begins with one person, and a person discharges it only by joining organised, sustained effort with others; the movement answers for the outcome, the citizen for the contribution.

Everyone shares the obligations, in unequal measure. A council that holds land obtained through dispossession owes a different repair from a tenant with little money or influence. Whoever controls budgets, records, or policy has duties that arise from those particular powers.

1. We need to know our own Constitution, and make that knowledge public provision

Among Davis's post-referendum judgements, the one about ignorance reaches furthest into the majority. "The poor level of civics knowledge in Australia made many vulnerable to these non-factual assertions about the Constitution recognising all Australians equally." And: "That so many do not know race resides in the Constitution … means we are a country that does not know itself." Her next line but one: "We are a country with no memory."[7]

That failure of citizenship belongs to the majority. The first duty is to understand the race power in section 51(xxvi), the racial disqualification that section 25 still contemplates, the absence of any treaty at the national level, and how section 128 works, well enough to explain all of it to a sceptical neighbour.[5] The ally studies Indigenous culture; the citizen also studies their own founding document.

A national gap needs national institutions, and we already fund them: the school curriculum, the citizenship test, the adult-education program, and the library series. A country that "does not know itself" learns through institutions, and the majority elects the governments and boards that run them. Locally, that can be as plain as asking the library or council to host an evening on sections 25, 51(xxvi), and 128, led by someone who can field a hostile question. A program that counts attendance and ignores what people understood mistakes activity for an outcome.

2. We need to tell the truth about our own side: the state, the councils, and the churches

The Uluru Dialogues asked "for non-Aboriginal Australians to take responsibility for that history, and this legacy it has created."[6]

Truth-telling usually runs in one direction. First Nations people recount, again and again, what settlers and governments did to them and their families, and non-Indigenous people listen. Listening matters. It also leaves the listener's own side unexamined, and it keeps the burden of proof on the people who suffered the harm.

Davis wrote after the referendum that she was "sceptical that truth-telling would help at this point."[7] Her doubt leaves room for a form the country has rarely attempted: the majority examining its own records. Non-Indigenous Australians, as descendants of settlement or as its beneficiaries, can research the pastoral run that became their suburb, the revoked reserve, the council minutes, and the massacre site near the school. That record answers her charge that Australia is "a country with no memory," and it ends an arrangement in which First Nations people must prove, case by case, what the record already shows.

Much of the record sits in institutions that ordinary Australians still join and fund. Three kinds of institution hold most of it.

The state. The state-appointed "Protector" controlled where Aboriginal people could live, work, and marry, and much of the paper that system produced now sits in Queensland State Archives. Queensland began a Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry in July 2024. It ceased when Parliament repealed the *Path to Treaty Act 2023* on 29 November 2024, and the State Archives will keep its documents as well.[19] With the Inquiry gone, the task falls to citizens and to the institutions that hold the records.

The councils. Local governments recorded their decisions in minute books, including decisions about Aboriginal camps, reserves, land, and place names. Those minutes belong to the ratepayers, who can ask to read them. Brisbane's record runs into the present. The Council has known since 2008, from the cultural heritage studies it commissioned for the Northern Link tunnel, that York's Hollow, Barrambin, in what is now Victoria Park, is the most important Aboriginal cultural heritage site known within the corridor.[20] In 2021 its LNP councillors voted down a motion to use the name Barrambin more widely.[21] On 1 June 2026 the state's Games Independent Infrastructure Coordination Authority took over the site to build the 2032 Olympic stadium.[22]

The churches. Churches ran missions, kept the registers of baptisms, marriages, and deaths for the people on them, and corresponded with government about the policies they helped to enforce. Queensland's record can

be specific. In 1899 a Salvation Army member, William John Thompson, opened discussions with the government about an Aboriginal mission in the Nanango district. The government gazetted a reserve at Barambah in March 1900, revoked it, and in February 1901 gazetted a larger one three miles away: the place now called Cherbourg. The state's own community history counts some 2,079 documented removals to Cherbourg between 1905 and 1939.[23] Each of those steps left records in a gazette, a departmental file, or a church's correspondence.

Citizens can act on this record. A ratepayer can ask a councillor to move that the council examine its own decisions about Aboriginal land, reserves, camps, and place names; fund Traditional Owners to take part, on terms they agree, including how the council will use their testimony; and report publicly on what it found and what it will change. A parishioner can ask the parish, diocese, or synod what records it holds from missions and reserves, whether the families named in them can see those records, and whether the church has examined its own part in government policy. A business or university can trace the sources of its assets. Anyone can apply under Queensland's Right to Information process for records the state still holds.

Registers of baptisms, removals, and deaths name real families. Access to those records belongs first to the families and communities named in them, on terms those communities set. An institution owes the public an account of its own conduct; it owes the families their records.

Those who keep the records should bear the burden of bringing that history into view. A Makarrata Commission for agreement-making and truth-telling, for which the Uluru Statement calls, would be the national form of the same duty.[14] Councils and churches can begin today.

3. We need to make the Uluru Statement a condition of any republic

Allyship settings rarely discuss the republic, yet no obligation shows more plainly what the majority alone can do.

In 2018 Davis argued that a republic and Indigenous recognition must travel together. "To move to a republic without addressing unfinished business would be, in excluding Indigenous peoples, unjust." Without structural reform, "an Australian head of state is, to put it crudely, putting lipstick on a pig." And: "To have a republic before addressing unfinished business is to taunt."[6]

She also endorsed Mark McKenna's view that the Uluru Statement is "the blueprint for an Australian republic."[24] In October 2025 she confirmed that "the republic is still on the agenda," alongside the insistence that "the Voice is still needed. Nothing has changed."[25]

A republic, a new preamble, or a new head of state would each re-found Australian sovereignty, and each is a decision of the majority. The people can make the settlement the Uluru Statement sets out, a constitutional Voice, agreement-making, and truth-telling, a condition of any such re-founding. Only voters can approve a republic, so only voters can refuse one that leaves the Uluru Statement unanswered. Of the four obligations, this one already operates at the level of the whole people: a condition the majority can attach to its own next founding act.

4. We need to organise where we live

More than 9.4 million Australians voted No in 2023.[26] The campaign cast First Nations advocates as the other party to the question, yet the task of persuading No voters belongs to the majority, and to the people inside it.

Davis's post-referendum strategy has a structure. In 2024 she described "yarning with Aussies across the spectrum without a politician or camera in sight. This is the silent work of the people."[9] In 2025 she recalled the original design: "working with Aussies across 151 electorates, actually going and talking to them."[2] And in October 2025 she added: "we need to get out into Australia and have these conversations about what happened, what we think went wrong."[27] Taken together, she asks for conversations in every electorate, held by Australians themselves.

Allies amplify First Nations voices, mostly to people who already agree. Citizens persuade their own mothers' clubs, footy clubs, and workplaces, where the votes are.

What to say matters as much as whom to meet. The communications research Davis described at the summit also showed what the Yes campaign abandoned. The campaign, she said, chose "to run with equality," and so invited the reply "why should you have rights that we don't have."[1] A conversation with a No-voting neighbour should begin with belonging, the ground on which the research found Australians receptive.

In 2016 and 2017 the Regional Dialogues gave First Nations people a way to deliberate together, and that process produced a mandate: the Uluru

Statement. The non-Indigenous majority still lacks such a forum. Its persuading happens privately, if at all, one dinner-table conversation at a time, and it stops when a campaign ends. This obligation needs an institution that outlasts a campaign.

VII. My proposal: a standing group in every electorate

The obligation to persuade neighbours belongs to every non-Indigenous citizen. My proposal supplies the institution that keeps that persuasion going between referendums: a standing local group in each federal electorate, of which there are now 150.[28] The design is mine, and it has five features.

- Residents run it, do its work, and choose how to make the case to their neighbours.
- On matters concerning First Nations people, it answers to the First Nations organisations of its region, which set its priorities. That relationship takes a written form: a named relationship with the Traditional Owner corporation or community-controlled body of the region, a standing invitation to that body to set the group's priorities, and an undertaking that where those bodies disagree, the group waits until they agree.
- It speaks for its members. It is a minority seeking a majority, and it earns support by persuasion and by results.
- It grows out of bodies that already exist: a local ANTaR group, a parish social-justice committee, a union branch, or a group you may already have joined.
- It judges itself by whether people end up better informed, more willing to act, and able to keep acting together.

Those features answer the criticisms of allyship Davis surveyed at the summit. In the critics' words, as she reported them, "being an ally requires no invitation, no accountability or sustained commitment."[1] The group invites First Nations bodies to set its priorities, answers to them, and persists between referendums.

The design of the remedy belongs to First Nations. The group organises only the majority's own side: who talks to the mothers' clubs, the footy clubs, and the workplaces. The majority owes that organising and has left it undone.

Two cautions apply. A movement needs a national majority and a majority in four states, which is task enough, and it can win them with many No voters still unpersuaded.[5] And the referendum's loss leaves the persuasive power of conversation unmeasured. Davis's team found at the start of 2023 that "if you had dinner with an Aboriginal person, you're more likely to vote 'yes'."[27] That is a finding about contact. Someone has yet to build a strategy that moves millions of votes on that finding, and local groups are the place to build it.

VIII. Honest limits

The method. The electorate groups depend on organising that has yet to work at scale, and on a measure of success better than attendance: whether people end up better informed, more willing to act, and able to sustain action together. Until a group somewhere can show that, the proposal remains an untested design.

The standpoint. I write as a non-Indigenous Australian reading a First Nations leader's argument. The four obligations are my extension of her premise, and the electorate groups are my proposal alone. I answer for both.

Who must finish the founding

The follow-up discussion asked what word to use now. Davis's challenge answers a different question: what is this country, and who must finish founding it?

The ally stood beside a cause that belonged to someone else. The citizen stands inside it. The Constitution is ours, the history is ours, the neighbours who voted No are ours to persuade, and the next founding moment will be ours to decide. Because only the people acting as one body can change the Constitution, we must discharge all of it together. Ownership remains when the label goes, and it asks far more than a change of vocabulary. No number of morning teas will settle it.

Each of us should be able to say what we have undertaken, to whom we answer, and what changed because we took part.

Where to start in Magandjin (Brisbane)

- **Know the Constitution.** Ask your local library or councillor to host a public evening on sections 25, 51(xxvi), and 128, with a speaker who can field a hostile question.
- **Ask about the Council's record.** Ask your Brisbane City councillor what the Council has done with its own 2008 finding about Barrambin.
- **Ask about church records.** Ask your parish or diocese what mission records it holds, and whether the families named in them can see them.
- **Defend Barrambin.** Join the Save Victoria Park mailing list and support its legal fund.
- **Put your organisation on the record.** Ask your workplace, union, congregation, or professional body to sign the Allies for Uluru Statement of Commitment, and to attach a budget line to it. Individuals cannot sign; organisations can.
- **Ask your MPs for a written position.** Choose one of the 25 recommendations in the Social Justice Report 2025 and ask your state and federal members, in writing, where they stand on it.
- **Fund the front line.** Set up a recurring donation to ATSILS Queensland, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service.
- **Start an electorate group.** Talk with your local ANTaR group, parish social-justice committee, or union branch about what a standing group in your seat would need, starting with the First Nations organisations of the region and what they would ask of it.

Notes

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4. SBS, "The journey to the Uluru Statement from the Heart", 10 October 2022: thirteen Regional Dialogues, December 2016 to May 2017, with more than 1,200 First Nations delegates.

5. Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act, preamble and sections 25, 51(xxvi), and 128. Federal Register of Legislation.

6. Megan Davis, Henry Parkes Oration, 22 October 2018, "And remind them that we have robbed them? Re-imagining a nation: Indigenous recognition, constitutional reform and a future Australian republic". Edited transcript, Henry Parkes Foundation.

7. Megan Davis, "Truth after the Voice", *The Monthly*, December 2023 to January 2024 edition.

8. *Australian Financial Review*, "Hatred of politicians killed the Voice: Megan Davis", 6 December 2023.

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13. Megan Davis, "Voice of Reason: On Recognition and Renewal", *Quarterly Essay* 90, June 2023 (extract).

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16. Parliamentary Library, Bills Digest, "Constitution Alteration (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice) 2023", 2022 to 2023.

17. Victorian Government, "Treaty timeline", including Royal Assent on 13 November 2025 and commencement of the Statewide Treaty on 12 December 2025.

18. Australian Bureau of Statistics, "2021 Census: Nearly half of Australians have a parent born overseas", 28 June 2022.

19. Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry, closure notice: the Inquiry ceased on the repeal of the *Path to Treaty Act 2023* on 29 November 2024, and its documents are to be stored at Queensland State Archives.

20. Philippe Foubert, "Barrambin Cultural Heritage Statement", drawing on the Brisbane City Council Northern Link cultural heritage studies (2008) and Queensland Heritage Register listing 602493.

21. ABC News, "Brisbane's LNP councillors vote down motion to use Victoria Park's Indigenous name more widely", 4 August 2021.

22. The Daily Aus, "Work starts on Brisbane's Olympic stadium despite protests", 1 June 2026.

23. Queensland Government, "Cherbourg", community histories.

24. Megan Davis, "The status quo ain't working", *The Monthly*, 2018.

25. NITV, "Two years on from the Voice referendum, its architects remain committed to the cause", 14 October 2025.

26. Australian Electoral Commission, "2023 Referendum: national results": 9,452,792 No votes (60.06 per cent).

27. AAP, "Voice referendum to provide springboard for recognition", *The Canberra Times*, 23 October 2025, reporting Davis's Centre for Public Integrity oration of 22 October 2025.

28. Australian Electoral Commission, "1,456 candidates to contest 2025 federal election", 12 April 2025 (150 House of Representatives seats).