

What went wrong with Australia's Indigenous call for a voice?

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Welcome to the inquiry on the BBC World Service with me, David Baker. Each week, one question, four expert witnesses and an answer.

May 21st 2022 – In his first speech, Australia's new Prime Minister Anthony Albanese is outlining his vision for the nation. In among the promises of economic growth and greater security, there's a pledge that is music to the ears of Australia's indigenous population. “I begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet. I pay my respects to their eldest – past, present and emerging – and on behalf of the Australian Labor Party I commit to the Uluru Statement from the Heart in full.”

The proposal to recognise for the first time in Australia's constitution the rights of the country's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples seems to have widespread support in early polls. More than 60% of Australians are in favour. But 18 months on, in October this year, voters deliver a resounding no. So, this week on *The Inquiry* we're asking:

What went wrong with Australia's Indigenous call for a voice?

Part 1 – Australia's original inhabitants 01:55 – 6:35

John Maynard, Emeritus professor of Indigenous Education and Research at the University of Newcastle, Australia

Part 2 – Going to the polls 06:37 – 12:15

Tim Soutphommasane, Political theorist and Chief Diversity Officer at the University of Oxford, UK

Part 3 – The two campaigns 12:10 – 17:30

Andrea Carson, Professor of Political Communication at La Trobe University, Australia

Part 4 – Where now for Australia's indigenous peoples? 17:34 - 22:33

Thomas Mayo, signatory to the Uluru Statement from the Heart

So, to come back to our question: What went wrong with Australia's Indigenous call for a voice? Well, in the end it came down to political gravity. It's hard to win a referendum in Australia without bipartisan support. But at the very least, the debate brought the lives and dreams and demands of the country's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to the attention of the whole nation. Very few Australians could now say that they are unaware of what Australia's First Nation peoples are holding out for. And that's not bad for a group that only makes up 4% of the country.