

First Indigenous Voice to be adopted by South Australian parliament

Steven Marshall says 'SA is going to play its part in how Aboriginal Australians have representation and look at legislation'. Picture: Keryn Stevens

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South Australian Premier Steven Marshall has escalated plans to create the nation's first Indigenous Voice to parliament, revealing it will comprise a 13-member advisory committee open only to Aboriginal Australians to be appointed and elected by the end of this year.

Mr Marshall on Thursday joined NSW Liberal senator Andrew Bragg in urging national - action on the initiative amid a growing push from Liberal Party moderates for Scott Morrison to hold a referendum on constitutional recognition for a Voice in the next term of parliament.

Mr Marshall believes the ground-breaking SA plan could become a model for a federal voice, with national elections to be held so Indigenous Australians can elect their own representatives to the federal body.

Under the SA plan, a special election will be held where Indigenous South Australians will vote for six representatives on the Voice. Another six members will be appointed by the state government, while the 13th, who will be the chairman, will be the state's Commissioner for Aboriginal Engagement, Roger Thomas.

The hybrid appointed and elected Voice model will operate for three years before shifting to a fully elected model, with the SA Electoral Commission conducting a statewide ballot to install the 12 Voice members.

Mr Marshall on Thursday presided over the launch of a new book on the 2017 Uluru Statement authored by Senator Bragg, which urges a referendum during the term of the next federal parliament to enshrine a national Voice in the Constitution.

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Senator Bragg's push received further support this week after the Prime Minister was urged by lawyer Mark Leibler, the chairman of the Australia Israel Chamber of Commerce, to back the move for a referendum.

Andrew Bragg says a Voice would in no way compete with the authority of parliament, and also that its advice was not binding. Picture: Gary Ramage

"We must maintain a bipartisan approach to constitutional recognition of Australia's First Peoples and, as proposed in the Uluru Statement from the Heart, give the decision on an Indigenous Voice to parliament to the Australian people," Mr Leibler told the Prime Minister at the chamber's Thursday lunch in Melbourne.

But SA Labor accused the Marshall government of not going far enough, arguing the Voice was just one of three key recommendations in the 2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart. Labor wants the government to sign treaties with Indigenous groups to address past injustice and land use.

Mr Marshall has moved away from treaties since his 2018 election but supports the Voice and said he believed it would make parliament better informed on Indigenous issues.

In Adelaide, Mr Marshall used the launch of Senator Bragg's book to cite SA's work on creating a state-based Voice as an example of what could be achieved. He said the state had already made symbolic changes including permanently flying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island flags in the chamber and having Mr Thomas address parliament on progress.

Mr Marshall said the more important step would be the creation of a Voice. "We hope to have in our parliament these coming months legislation that looks at how we establish that body," he said. "SA is going to play its part in how Aboriginal Australians have representation and look at legislation. I am very excited about that being introduced."

Mr Marshall acknowledged Senator Bragg's "championing" of the Voice, given proposals had previously been criticised by high-profile figures including former prime minister Malcolm Turnbull and Nationals MP Barnaby Joyce.

"This issue can often be divisive so it is very, very helpful to see someone from the Liberal Party taking a leadership role and arguing from our side of politics," the Premier said. "Australia has some big decisions to make about how we take the next step in a positive way that unites the nation."

Mr Marshall said the final details about how the Voice would work with parliament were still being considered by Mr Thomas.

Like other states, SA already has an Aboriginal Advisory Council, which addresses cabinet twice a year. It is likely members of that committee will be appointed to the Voice during its initial three-year phase, with the remainder elected .

Mr Marshall's spokeswoman said the plan was to hold the first elections this year. "At this stage, the election is scheduled for later this year and discussions are being held between the Commissioner for Aboriginal Engagement and the electoral commissioner about arrangements for the election," she said. "It is proposed that the Voice will have regular engagement with government and the parliament to ensure the views of Aboriginal people and communities are strongly represented in decisions affecting them.

"Another issue being considered is how the state Voice could complement the proposed Voice to federal parliament."

Senator Bragg told his book launch that a Voice would in no way compete with the authority of parliament, and also that its advice was not binding.

SA Labor's Indigenous Affairs spokesman, Kyam Maher, said the government should - implement the Uluru Statement in full rather than just embracing the recommendation of a Voice.