



**From the Office of the
Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia**

THE MOST REVEREND DR PHILIP FREIER
BAppSc Dip Ed BD MEdSt PhD FAICD
Archbishop of Melbourne and Primate of Australia

209 Flinders Lane
Melbourne VIC 3000
P: 03 9653 4204
www.anglicanprimate.org.au
www.facebook.com/ArchbishopPhilipFreier

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Don't drop Indigenous recognition, Church pleads

Constitutional recognition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander has dropped increasingly below the Federal Government's radar, but it is vital if Australia's Indigenous people are to flourish, according to the head of the Anglican Church in Australia, Melbourne Archbishop Philip Freier.

Dr Freier, who is the Primate of Australia, said the fate of the plebiscite on same-sex marriage – abandoned over fears of a divisive debate – must not be allowed to determine the course of a referendum on Indigenous recognition.

The Anglican Church is moving to support constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Church's own constitution. The Standing Committee, which governs the church between the three yearly national synods, has asked the national Public Affairs Commission and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Anglican Council to consider the best ways to do so.

Meeting last week, the Standing Committee resolved to support recognition at the Federal Parliamentary level, including removing powers to make laws on the basis of race while allowing the Commonwealth to make laws to overcome disadvantage, ameliorate past discrimination and protect culture, language and heritage.

Dr Freier said he was concerned at the latest delay to the proposed referendum on constitutional recognition from May 2017 until the year after at the earliest, which followed "a long history of this issue being deferred". He said he hoped it did not "signify a reduced commitment to this opportunity for important change before the Australian people".

The probable desire of Indigenous Australians for any constitutional change to include giving the First Nations people treaty-making powers would need strong bipartisan support to succeed, he said.

For more details, contact Barney Zwartz, bzwartz@melbourneanglican.org.au; 0422373891