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media release

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Indigenous constitutional recognition: change needed

Australia should change its Constitution to recognise Indigenous people and to prohibit racial discrimination, according to an independent report handed to Prime Minister Julia Gillard today by the Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

The Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC), which runs the Indigenous Justice Program, strongly supports the Panel's proposals for constitutional reform. We urge the Prime Minister and the Opposition Leader to adopt a bi-partisan approach to constitutional reform.

The Government-appointed Panel has called for the following constitutional amendments:

- A statement recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Constitution.
- The repeal of the overtly racist section 25 of the Constitution. This section gives state governments power to disqualify people of a particular race from voting.
- The replacement of the power that allows laws to be made that disadvantage Indigenous people.
- A prohibition on discrimination based on race, colour, ethnic or national origin.
- The recognition of English as Australia's official language, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages as original Australian languages and part of our heritage.

'The Constitution is our basic law. It should reflect that Australians value equality and respect. This is why we should follow the Panel's recommendations,' said PIAC chief executive, Edward Santow.

'The Constitution permitted shameful treatment of Indigenous Australians, including the Stolen Generations policy and systematic theft of Indigenous wages. We call on the Australian people to support these proposed changes to our Constitution to ensure equal treatment for all in our community.'

'The Panel consulted widely in preparing this report. It held over 200 public consultations, received over 3,500 submissions and commissioned additional research from Newspoll. It is significant that over 82 per cent of people surveyed support constitutional change,' Mr Santow said.

MEDIA CONTACTS: PIAC Media and Communications Officer, Dominic O'Grady: 0400 110 169.

[Vote YES to end racial discrimination](#). PIAC's submission to the Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians is online at www.piac.asn.au