



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Federation Chamber**

**BILLS**

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander  
Peoples Recognition Bill 2012**

**Second Reading**

**SPEECH**

**Thursday, 7 February 2013**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Thursday, 7 February 2013  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Husic, Ed, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr HUSIC** (Chifley—Government Whip) (12:27): For some time now there has been some debate and discussion in many quarters within the community about the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the most critical document to our nation, the Australian Constitution. These conversations have been ongoing. They have been across many places. They have in some cases generated agreement and in other cases not. Having said that, people do recognise that a Constitution that aims to bind all people within one country should be representative of all people within this one country. From my perspective, for us to have a situation where some are included in recognition and others are not does not ensure that our Constitution is as strong as it can be, but, importantly, it is an oversight, as I would describe it, in a way that marginalises and does not prove to be as fully inclusive as we all hope it would be. In this country we hope that we do ensure in all the organs of our nation, in both a practical and a symbolic sense, that people do feel that they have a part to play and that they are truly included. For us, ensuring that the Constitution does that is critical.

This bill is a touchstone, but it is only one. It needs to in one way, shape or form move us closer to agreement, but we are not there yet. Through the course of the contributions here today, and elsewhere, others have expressed their disappointment that we have not moved that quickly. I certainly share that view. But, again, for the purpose of our end objective, which is to have people feel that they are being included, we need to ensure that we are all in agreement along the way. So, for us, this is only a touchstone in terms of recognition of Australia's Indigenous peoples in the Constitution, but it is still recognises at this point the special place of Indigenous people as the first Australians.

We arrive here as a result of the unanimous recommendations of the government appointed the expert panel on constitutional recognition of Indigenous Australians. The work of this expert panel, across the course of 2011, ultimately reached its peak when it handed over its report in January last year. It represented a great deal of work in talking to the community about what they expected, and gaining their views and ensuring that they could be best represented in the final report of that expert panel. Ultimately, it will be the voice of the Australian people who give constitutional recognition to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Debate interrupted.