

Submission to Yoorrook Justice Commission**From: Anonymous 984****Dated: 2 October 2024****Submission:**

A Year On: Reflecting on the Strength of Our Mob After the Voice No Vote

A year has passed since the No vote on the Voice to Parliament, and our mob is still feeling the weight. The referendum was more than just a political moment; it was a test of how this country views us, our culture, and our place in it. The debates were relentless, filled with ignorance and negativity, and left our people drained.

It felt like every non-Aboriginal person suddenly became an expert on our lives, our issues, and our history. For many of us with mixed heritage, the attacks on our identity were especially painful. The constant questioning—"Why do you claim to be Aboriginal?"—was like being cut by the same blade over and over. It felt like people wanted to strip away our connection to Country, culture, and community, deciding for us who we are and who we're allowed to be. That kind of judgment wasn't just hurtful; it did real harm, especially to our young ones.

In the months that followed the referendum, we saw the emotional toll in our communities. The doubt, the judgment, and the refusal to listen have chipped away at our collective self-worth. It's tough to keep standing strong when society loves to showcase our culture but won't stand with us when we demand justice and equality. Many of us felt isolated, as if the entire country turned its back on us.

But here we are, one year on. Our ancestors faced far worse, and their resilience flows through us. The referendum may have rejected our voice, but it didn't break our spirit. It was a reminder that this country has a long way to go when it comes to understanding and respecting First Nations people. Yet, through the pain, we continue to rise.

This past year has taught us about the importance of healing and reclaiming our space. We've come to realise that we need to step back, to care for each other, and to rebuild our strength from within. This doesn't mean we're backing down—it means we're looking after ourselves, for the long road ahead.

Our stories, our connections to Country, and our culture are as strong as ever, and they're what will carry us forward. What we need now from non-Aboriginal people is to stop talking over us, stop questioning our identity, and stop pretending to understand the depth of our experiences. If you want to walk with us, truly walk with us, then it's time to listen. It's time to recognise that our strength comes from the very thing this country has tried to erase—our deep connection to this land and each other.

As we reflect one year on, it's clear that the No vote didn't define us. It was a moment of reckoning, but not the end of our story. Our community, our culture, and our spirit are stronger than any referendum. We will keep standing, unapologetically Aboriginal, because that's who we've always been, and no vote can take that away from us.

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