

Give indigenous a voice, says teary Macklin in valedictory speech



Jenny Macklin delivers her valedictory speech in the House of Representatives yesterday.

- Greg Brown
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Outgoing Labor MP Jenny Macklin, who played a key role in Kevin Rudd's apology to the Stolen Generations, has called on the parliament to "get on" with backing a constitutionally enshrined indigenous "voice to parliament" as she bids farewell to a 23-year career in federal politics.

The member for the Victorian electorate of Jagajaga yesterday delivered a teary valedictory in the House of Representatives, lamenting that Australians were losing faith in politics and the nation's institutions.

"They don't trust the institutions and systems they were told were there to provide for them and protect them," Ms Macklin said yesterday. "And why would they? What splashed across the front pages during the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and the banking royal commission reinforced what many people had long suspected. That the system is rigged. That powerful people can do what they want, take what they want, and nothing will change.

"It is bad enough for Australians to lose faith in us — it is worse still if they give up on us. We cannot allow this to happen."

The former deputy Labor leader fittingly opened her speech on indigenous affairs, of which she was the responsible minister in the former government. She urged MPs across the aisle against using the “false dichotomy” between practical and symbolic change for Aboriginal Australians as she labelled the proposed indigenous voice as a potentially “unifying new institution” for the nation.

“A good education is vital, so is healthcare, so is housing and employment. But so is pride in yourself, power over your own life, a sense of belonging and respect,” Ms Macklin said.

“That’s what the voice to parliament is all about — our First Australians being heard, being included, and being respected. This could be a powerful, unifying new institution for our country — something all of us can be proud of. So let’s get on with it.”

Ms Macklin said there were only four Labor women in the House of Representatives when she was elected in 1996. “Now, we are on the cusp of 50-50 representation, and so much stronger for it. Quotas work,” she said.

Ms Macklin named the National Disability Insurance Scheme, increases to the pension and a paid parental leave scheme as among her proudest achievements in politics.