

## Josh Frydenberg won't endorse objective of Andrew Bragg's book on Indigenous voice to parliament

*Senator's book, Buraadja, is a history of the Liberal party's role in Indigenous affairs and makes the case for the Uluru statement*



*Federal treasurer Josh Frydenberg says advocates of an Indigenous voice to parliament need to be flexible.*

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Josh Frydenberg says his Liberal colleague Andrew Bragg has made a “very powerful case for constitutional change” when it comes to the Uluru statement – but the treasurer has declined to endorse that objective, and warned Indigenous leaders against making ultimatums.

At a virtual event launching Bragg's book *Buraadja*, Frydenberg said on Wednesday the Liberal backbench senator's book created an intellectual framework to think about next steps in reconciliation in a “Liberal context”.

Bragg's book is a history of the Liberal party's role in Indigenous affairs that also puts the case for a constitutional amendment requiring that First Nations people are heard during policymaking.

Two Liberal premiers, Gladys Berejiklian and Steven Marshall, have explicitly endorsed Bragg's arguments in favour of constitutional recognition. But the treasurer **said** on Wednesday he did not intend to join them.

Frydenberg also urged advocates of the Uluru statement to be flexible, “because if this proposition with the voice is a take it or leave it, I don’t think it necessarily advances in the way that some people would like it to do”.

The Uluru statement calls for the establishment of a “voice” to parliament that would be enshrined in the constitution. A constitutionally enshrined “voice” cannot be abolished by the government of the day.

But the proposal remains deeply controversial within the Coalition. Senior Coalition players have derided the concept, falsely, as a third chamber of parliament but the minister for Indigenous Australians, Ken Wyatt, has embarked on a co-design process for the “voice”.

The Morrison government is now poised to consider the final report from consultations into the co-design process led by Indigenous leaders Marcia Langton and Tom Calma.

Frydenberg on Wednesday characterised Bragg’s book as challenging, honest and persuasive, but said: “I’m not going to go as far today as Gladys did, and Steven Marshall did in endorsing this book, and indeed in terms of endorsing Andrew’s central thesis about constitutional change.

“What I would do though is talk about the purpose, the goal of what they’re seeking to do with this constitutional change,” Frydenberg said.

“We know how difficult it is to get constitutional change through in our country, where we need that double majority of voters and states, but also legislative change is difficult too – I don’t think we should overlook that fact as well.

“We’ve really got to focus on what unites us here and what divides us. What we need to do is ensure the change, whatever form it takes, is bipartisan. You don’t get many chances at this and you need to take the public with you.

“This is the reality we have to shape. This is where we need to work through the issue and this is what Andrew has done [in *Buraadja*].”



*Liberal senator Andrew Bragg has written a book, *Buraadja*, on the Liberal party's role in Indigenous affairs.*

Frydenberg said Australia had invested in improving the lives of Indigenous Australians through initiatives like *Closing the Gap* “but as the prime minister said in the parliament just a few weeks ago with respect to Closing the Gap we may be doing well on preschools, but incarceration rates, youth detention, life expectancy, we are nowhere near where we want to be”.

He said there was a role for meaningful gestures of reconciliation as well as the pursuit of practical policies like Closing the Gap. Frydenberg said Bragg's book "gets us to think about the importance of change and recognition".

Frydenberg said Noel Pearson had noted during the Howard era that "only a conservative leader that can carry the conservative sections of our society will be able to deliver this true solution, this true reconciliation, this true change".

He said Bragg was attempting to motivate Coalition colleagues around that central objective, ensuring that the Liberal party remained "progressive from Menzies to Morrison".

"I am very hopeful for the future," Frydenberg said. "I want people to understand there are many people across the parliament who are determined to see change.

"The exact form that takes – time will tell. There is certainly a willingness to enter into this debate."