

STATEMENT ON THE VOTE

Now that the referendum result is known, it's time to look forward rather than look back. There will be a time for looking back, but a cooling off period may be needed if we are to see more clearly. Now is the time to ask not how we got here but where this result leaves us as a nation, where we need to go from here and how we might get there.

One thing is clear: the nation is more divided than ever and in many ways. It's ironic that a process supposed to unite the nation has done just the opposite. There's an urgent need now to create a new kind of national unity, and that can't be left to the politicians, because there's more to this than politics. The task belongs to all of us.

A second thing is still clearer and more urgent: the search for reconciliation based on truth and justice must continue, even if the referendum process and result have made that more difficult. This too is something that can't be left to the politicians, because again there's more to it than politics.

After this result at Federal level, the focus will have to move to the States. But it will also have to move to non-government organisations like the Churches. The Australian Catholic bishops have spoken of the need for a new engagement with Indigenous peoples, and that now becomes more pressing. In the Archdiocese of Brisbane we will commit ourselves more resolutely to our Reconciliation Action Plan and keep asking what else we can do. Fine words and symbolic gestures are not enough.

The process leading to this vote has been a highly politicised slog that has changed Australia, and not for the better. Now the real work begins. It's up to all of us to ensure that what we do from here serves national unity and racial justice, because we'll never have the first unless we have the second.

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