HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
LAID ON THE TABLE
12 Nov 2026

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

JOINT SITTING OF THE TWO HOUSES TO RECEIVE AN ADDRESS FROM THE STATE FIRST NATIONS VOICE

THURSDAY, 12 NOVEMBER 2026

1. *Meeting of the Houses* -

The Houses of Parliament met at 9.45 a.m. in the Chamber of the Legislative Council in answer to summons of the President of the Legislative Council, issued in pursuance of section 38 of the First Nations Voice Act 2023 and by virtue of Joint Standing Order of the Houses No. 16.

The Hon. R. B. Martin (President of the Legislative Council) took the Chair.

The Hon. N. F. Cook (Speaker of the House of Assembly) occupied a chair to the right of the Chair.

The President acknowledged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional owners of this country.

2. *Admission of Presiding Member of State First Nations Voice* -

A Presiding Member of the State First Nations Voice was admitted to the Chamber and to deliver and Address to the two Houses.

3. *Opening Remarks* -

The Hon. K. J. Maher, Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council made opening remarks to the joint sitting.

4. *Address by State First Nations Voice* -

Mr. Leeroy Bilney, a Presiding Member of the State First Nations Voice delivered an Address to the joint sitting of the two Houses and presented a report to the President of the Legislative Council and the Speaker of the House of Assembly.

5. The President, at fifteen minutes past ten o'clock declared the Joint Sitting closed.

MEMBERS PRESENT

All Members of the Legislative Council except the Hons. C. Bernardi, S. L. Game and R. J. Hewett, D.G.E. Hood and C. L. Quaremba and all Members of the House of Assembly except the Hon. M. E. Brown, Ms. Stinson and Ms Thomas, and Messrs Hughes, Paton, Rich, Roylance and Wilkins.

C. D. SCHWARZ,
Clerk of the Legislative Council

R. J. CRUMP,
Clerk of the House of Assembly

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

JOINT SITTING OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL AND THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY TO RECEIVE AN ADDRESS FROM THE STATE FIRST NATIONS VOICE

THURSDAY, 12 NOVEMBER 2026

The two houses of parliament assembled at 9.45am in the chamber of the Legislative Council in answer to a summons of the President of the Legislative Council issued in pursuance of section 38 of the First Nations Voice Act 2023 for the purpose of receiving a report and an address from the Presiding Member of the State First Nations Voice.

The PRESIDENT of the Legislative Council (Hon. R.B. Martin) took the Chair.

The SPEAKER of the House of Assembly (Hon. N.F. Cook) occupied a seat on the floor of the council to the right of the Chair.

The PRESIDENT acknowledged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional owners of this country throughout Australia, and their connection to the land and community, and paid respects to them and their cultures and to the elders both past and present.

The CLERK of the Legislative Council (Mr C.D. Schwarz) read the notice summoning the Joint Sitting.

The PRESIDENT: I call on the Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council to make introductory remarks, the Hon. Mr Maher.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER (Deputy Premier, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Attorney-General, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Arts, Special Minister of State): I would like to acknowledge where we are today, on the traditional lands of the Kaurna people. It always has been, it always will be, Aboriginal land like the rest of this country. We are here in Adelaide, Tarntanyangga, the big red kangaroo dreaming place, on the banks of the Karrawirra Parri, the Torrens River, and I think it is entirely proper, appropriate and respectful that we use Aboriginal names. For example, I live in Noarlunga, on the banks of the Onkaparinga, just up from Carrickalinga, Yankalilla, Willunga, Waitpinga and Myponga. We have been respectfully using Aboriginal names since the earliest days of colonisation in this country.

It is a significant moment that we are here today as we reflect on how far we have come from Sunday 26 March 2023, when the First Nations Voice Act passed. We had the first elections and now we have had the second set of elections, and I want to pay tribute to all 46 members of the Local Voices from right around South Australia, from Ceduna to Mount Gambier, to Pukatja and all points in between.

It is no small thing to put yourselves up for the judgement of your own community. We do that here in this place, but it is an especially important thing to do it in your Aboriginal communities. The fact that you have been elected, that your communities have placed their faith in you to represent your experience and your views to government, is a remarkable thing. Thank you for what you do, what you have done and what you are going to do into the future.

The Voice continues to help us make better decisions. In the decades I have spent working in Aboriginal affairs, one thing has become exceptionally apparent: you make better decisions when you get input from the people that your decisions affect. This is not limited to Aboriginal affairs. I think it applies to everything all of us do in this parliament. I mean, how could it be otherwise? We have seen already examples of significant changes that have been made in the way government operates on the basis of recommendations the Voice have made. We have instituted in the health system safe birthing in country practices. The Voice has had significant input into the domestic violence royal commission.

A central focus of the Voice in their first term, I know, has been and continues to be the criminal justice system. Despite effort and many good intentions, the over-representation of Aboriginal people in our jails continues to be a stain on us as a state and us as a nation. Members

of the Voice have spent significant time visiting our prisons, spending time observing courts and attending many briefings from government departments to look to see how we can make changes.

One example I want to give is the Voice's recommendation to government that there are far too many Aboriginal people, particularly Aboriginal men, in remand for the sole reason that there is not an appropriate place to be bailed to. Acting on that recommendation, the government is building a 30-person bail accommodation centre for Aboriginal people in northern Adelaide. This is estimated to save $1.6 million a year, the difference in the cost between someone being in a secure facility on remand and in a bail accommodation centre.

The total cost of the Voice each year, all the administration, secretariat, payments and travel, is $1.5 million a year. So if you are a conservative, economic rationalist, you would have good reason to support the Voice because in this one recommendation they are making a net saving to the taxpayer and to the state of South Australia, let alone the difference that will make for reducing reoffending.

I am very pleased that we will announce today we are acting on another recommendation of the Voice and for the very first time we will be employing Aboriginal reintegration officers in our prison system, starting with $1.5 million over the next five years for Aboriginal reintegration officers at the Port Augusta Prison, taking the strong advice of the Voice that Aboriginal people are all too often released from prison without appropriate wraparound services and without housing and culturally appropriate services to meet their needs.

These are concrete things that the government is doing differently based on the recommendations of the Voice. I know that the Premier, cabinet ministers, the government as a whole, the parliament and I have very much appreciated what the Voice has done so far, and we look forward to continuing to work collaboratively with the Voice over the coming years.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

The PRESIDENT: Thank you, Deputy Premier. I now invite Mr Leeroy Bilney, Joint Presiding Member of the State First Nations Voice, to give an address to the Joint Sitting.

Mr LEEROY BILNEY (Joint Presiding Member of the State First Nations Voice): I begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the lands on which we meet today, the Kaurna people, and pay my respects to their elders past and present. I also acknowledge the continuing connection of First Nations peoples to country, culture, community and knowledge, and extend my respects to First Nations peoples across South Australia, as well as our members here today.

As I present this year's address to parliament, we reflect on a year of change, progress and challenge. It has been an election year for both South Australia and the Voice, providing an opportunity to consider our priorities, the commitments made to our communities and whether these are translating into meaningful outcomes.

In the past twelve months, we have seen the second election of members to the First Nations Voice, we have welcomed a mix of old and new faces to the Local Voices, and we have also seen our advocacy lead to real change that in time could deliver lasting improvements for Aboriginal communities around our state. At times, it has felt like we are still flying the plane while continuing to build it. We have moved beyond some of the major construction, but important foundations are still being established.

While it was the second First Nations Voice election, this was the first time that our election was held at the same time as the state election, meaning that we all began the same year doing something very similar: campaigning. To be fair, that may be the closest we will ever get to common ground with some of the members here today, but it is worth mentioning.

For us, it was campaigning on two fronts. Some of you here today ran on a platform of abolishing the Voice, cutting off this direct link we have worked so hard to build and to strengthen. We were not just campaigning to get elected; we were campaigning for our existence. We are still encountering cynicism from some segments of the community, including from those in Aboriginal communities who question whether we can be truly independent and whether we can truly bring about change. That remains at the forefront of what we do each and every day, knowing we still need to build trust among Aboriginal communities and the broader South Australian community.

It is to show that this is not preferential treatment, that it is not a waste and that we can work together collaboratively, positively and in a spirit of understanding that delivering better outcomes for Indigenous communities delivers better results for all of us. That philosophy underpins our work.

Each and every candidate who put their hand up understands the importance of these roles and understands what it means for their communities and what it means for all of us. It was so heartening to see, despite some of the negative talk about the Voice and about its members, that members of the Aboriginal community still showed up to be heard.

Across the board, voter turnout increased between the last Voice election and this year's election, despite the significant barriers many of our communities faced when trying to have their say. People were questioned about their Aboriginality, denied the opportunity to vote and subjected to racist behaviour, segregation, judgement and cultural exclusion while exercising their democratic right. For communities where distrust and barriers to electoral participation have long existed, these experiences risk further undermining confidence in the democratic process.

However, we are hopeful that these experiences can lead to meaningful change before the next election in 2030. We have worked directly with former Australian Electoral Commissioner Tom Rogers AO as part of his review into the management of the state and Voice elections. Through our consultation, we heard from more than 280 First Nations people, capturing their honest experiences and recommendations across six regional submissions. Importantly, some people also reported positive experiences, demonstrating that accessible, respectful and culturally appropriate areas and spaces and voting arrangements are achievable. Mr Rogers has shown an understanding of the issues and a commitment to identifying the changes needed. We now hope his findings translate into practical action.

Future elections must build confidence in democratic participation, not create further barriers. This requires adequate staffing, properly trained personnel, clear information, effective queue management and polling place arrangements that respect Aboriginal people, their rights and their cultures.

The 2026 election marked a change as we welcomed new members to the Voice and said farewell to those who either were not re-elected or chose not to stand again. We saw 24 inaugural members returned, alongside 22 new members. I acknowledge the inaugural members for their commitment, service and contribution, and particularly their courage in leading the way for our mob in establishing South Australia's first Voice to Parliament. Serving on the Voice requires time, dedication and resilience, alongside family, community and professional responsibilities. Their work has helped establish the Voice's role and presence, and their contribution deserves recognition.

I also welcome our new and returning members, who have come together to continue this important work. They inherit both the progress achieved and the responsibility to advance the interests and priorities of First Nations people across South Australia. Our responsibility remains to bring community experiences and priorities to parliament and government, provide independent advice, challenge where necessary and advocate for better outcomes. The change in membership has brought fresh perspectives, new ways of working and new ideas on not only how we can do this better but on the types of policies, laws and changes we can advocate for that will make a difference for our mob.

Like the very members of parliament who are in this chamber right now, the First Nations Voice to Parliament is also governed by law. Under the First Nations Voice Act 2023, our Local Voices, the six regional bodies that make up the State Voice, have to meet between four and six times each year, as does the State Voice. We have met this requirement, with 29 Local Voice meetings around the state during 2026 and five State Voice meetings, with a sixth scheduled for December 2026.

But this is not all that we have done. We have gone beyond this, because doing our job properly means being out in our communities, talking to people and speaking up for them. We have been getting together with our communities and talking to community members, elders, local organisations, government representatives and stakeholders across metropolitan, regional and remote South Australia. Our Local Voice held 31 community engagement sessions across the state.

We observed the Spinifex Court program in operation and provided feedback to the magistrate on culturally responsive court processes and raised awareness with government agencies about the impacts of unpaid fines and debt on vulnerable First Nations people. We visited Mobilong and Cadell prisons, identifying concerns about cultural awareness, elders' visitation, mental health support, and access to cultural practices. We held a NAIDOC community stall to engage and connect with community members and continued community consultations on local priorities, including the North Adelaide Golf Course redevelopment and the Lot Fourteen cultural centre project.

We visited Gawler Health Service to learn more about Aboriginal health services, workforce challenges and opportunities to improve culturally appropriate care and attended the SA Aboriginal Football and Netball Carnival—the Nunga Carnival—engaging with elders and community members from across South Australia.

Our focus continues to be on housing and infrastructure, health and wellbeing, and justice and policing areas where significant systemic change is needed and where we believe the Voice can make a strong contribution.

Already, we have positive actions from government. An example of this is the Safe Birthing on Country initiative. Our advocacy highlighted the importance of culturally appropriate birthing options and ensuring Aboriginal mothers can access care closer to home and on country. This is an important step towards services that are shaped around the needs, knowledge, cultural practices and experiences of women, families and communities.

Another is the Spinifex Court program in Port Augusta, a recommendation of the Voice that now provides an accessible and more culturally supportive and appropriate court process for Anangu people and Aboriginal defendants from remote communities, particular those from the APY lands, Ceduna and Yalata. We look forward to seeing how these initiatives develop into consistent, statewide approaches. In our discussions with government, we highlighted further areas requiring attention, including:

- exploring culturally informed pathways for skills recognition;
- addressing under-occupancy in social housing;
- engaging on homelessness reform and service improvements;
- supporting the establishment of an Aboriginal community housing provider;
- strengthening whole-of-government responsibility for Aboriginal justice outcomes;
- improving access to education and training while on remand; and
- supporting and evaluating the Youth Aboriginal Community Court trial.

Despite this, considerable work remains in translating announcements into action and action into results. Some initiatives that government has agreed to progress are yet to translate into meaningful action, including the proposed Aboriginal co-design approach to replacing damaged state-owned and managed Indigenous housing. This must move beyond an agreed approach to genuine engagement and implementation.

Similarly, culturally informed skills recognition requires further progress beyond initial discussions. We cannot afford to lose momentum once commitments are made. We will continue to monitor progress and raise concerns where delivery falls short. We are not being critical for the sake of it. We are ensuring commitments translate into strong change. We will hold government accountable for delivering on those commitments and ensuring outcomes are visible to our communities. Where progress is made, we acknowledge it. Where there are delays, we should be honest; and where commitments are not being delivered, we must ask why. We have proposed progressing these priorities through pilot programs in metropolitan or regional areas to show these programs work, to get the evidence to back us up, and to work to expand them.

In terms of legislation, since the 2026 state election, the Voice has provided advice and made submissions on four separate pieces of legislation. One was the opposition's bill to repeal the Voice legislation, a bill we clearly and unequivocally opposed. For the record and for the benefit of those members present and those who may simply choose to catch up on the *Hansard* later on, let me be perfectly clear: the First Nations Voice to Parliament can work. It is working.

The safe Birthing on Country initiative, the new 30-bed bail accommodation support program for northern Adelaide, new Spinifex Court in Port Augusta, the pilot for Aboriginal co-design for replacement of damaged state owned and managed Indigenous housing, and mandated inclusion of

Aboriginal perspectives at the heart of South Australia's preventive health governance: our advocacy has helped get the attention of decision-makers, influenced policy discussions and contributed to action by government. So, yes, our work is leading to change.

I would hope that even those members who question our very existence can see the value of our work on the ground and the initiatives that we are championing. This is happening because a body made up of Aboriginal people, elected by Aboriginal people and hearing directly from Aboriginal people can make a difference when speaking to ministers, chief executives and the people responsible for delivering those services.

Our work has value, our work has purpose, and our work can lead to positive change not just for the Aboriginal communities who are continuing to experience significant disadvantages but for the whole of South Australia, because when our Aboriginal communities do better, we all do better. When there are clear, culturally sensitive pathways to break the cycle of recidivism, we are all safer, and when there are improvements that help with the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people in South Australia, the repercussions of that can be felt throughout the public health sector.

We have also provided feedback on the draft Mental Health and Wellbeing Bill 2025, providing our views on mental health assessments in prisons, community support systems, the benefits of mental health triaging, suicide prevention and support for families following suicide. These are complex issues but issues close to the hearts of many in our communities. We hope that highlighting the experiences Aboriginal people currently have with mental health services in South Australia, and having those views considered through the legislative process, can lead to better outcomes for all South Australians.

Similarly, the Flinders and Upper North Local Voice made a submission on the amendment of the Roxby Downs (Indenture Ratification) Act. Members objected to the amendment bill proceeding due to the broad approval it would grant for the expansion of mining operations and processing capacity and emphasised the importance of strong consultation with traditional owners.

There is one issue where we find ourselves both at loggerheads with the government that has supported our existence and on the same side as those who feel the Voice should not exist: fracking. We have been, and will always be, opposed to fracking in the South-East. Members from the Murraylands, Riverland and South-East region worked alongside local councils, state MPs, community groups and traditional owners to advocate against a bill that would have lifted the ban on fracking in the South-East.

One of our members joined local businesses, members of parliament, community groups and others to speak against the bill on the steps of Parliament House and also spoke publicly on the steps about the potential cultural impacts. This issue is not just about Aboriginal communities and listening to Aboriginal communities. It is about listening to all South Australians who are directly affected by this activity, and we will stand with those affected to speak against this activity.

There is another issue that we cannot continue to avoid: racism. Many of the issues we have spoken about today cannot be understood without acknowledging the role that racism, discrimination and systemic bias continue to play. We must be honest about some uncomfortable truths. Too often, our people are left dealing with the consequences of systems and decisions that were not designed with us. These are not isolated incidents. They reflect broader systemic issues.

Our people are over being a political football. We have had enough of our identity, rights and place in this state being used for political division. We want a South Australia that embraces and celebrates its cultural diversity, respects Aboriginal people, values their contribution and allows our children to participate without discrimination, but we need to get the foundation right. If we are serious about building an enduring relationship between First Nations people and government, we must confront these issues directly. Government must lead, with clear expectations, stronger accountability and frameworks that prevent racism rather than simply responding after harm has occurred.

Too often, we find ourselves identifying the same gaps and trying to fix the same problems. We need to move beyond that. Aboriginal people must be involved from the beginning in shaping the policies, legislation, services and systems that affect us rather than being asked to respond once decisions have been made or problems have emerged. Closing the Gap cannot be achieved through

targets and reporting alone. It requires government to examine its own systems, address institutional barriers and take responsibility for the decisions and practices that continue to contribute to inequitable outcomes.

This is not about solving every problem overnight. It is about recognising that lasting change requires more than another program, strategy or funding announcement. It requires confronting the underlying causes, addressing systemic barriers and strengthening legislation and accountability. Otherwise, we will continue treating the symptoms rather than addressing the causes.

Looking to the future, next year marks 10 years since the Uluru Statement from the Heart. That statement called for Voice, Truth and Treaty. From a South Australian perspective, we have one of three, a Voice. Last year, as a Voice, we renewed our call for truth-telling and Treaty, the next great steps in our journey towards justice and reconciliation. It is not simply policy initiatives. They are important steps towards acknowledging our shared history, addressing the ongoing impacts of past injustices and establishing stronger relationships between First Nations people and government.

Pleasingly, we have seen a commitment from the government to begin the journey, announcing an investment of $8½ million to establish a truth-telling commission and progress Treaty activities in South Australia. We understand work to progress these initiatives is expected to commence next year, which is welcome news indeed and a very significant step forward for Aboriginal communities. But it is just that: a step forward, and should be recognised as such.

The commission's success will depend on its independence, meaningful First Nations leadership and the opportunity for our people to shape the processes that affect them. We look forward to working with government to ensure the commitments translate into effective, practical action. We are also working with government on an evaluation framework to strengthen government's accountability by ensuring First Nations perspectives and lived experiences inform the evaluations of policies, programs and services.

Announcing a program or funding a service does not guarantee an outcome. We must ask whether services are culturally safe, meet community needs and are delivering real change. Ultimately, we want to understand how our advocacy influences decisions, shapes policies and leads to better outcomes for our mob.

We are also working to see how collaboration between government and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, those bodies that provide services directly to Aboriginal communities around South Australia, can be strengthened, because greater partnership and collaboration between government and ACCOs can help provide better services and ensure First Nations organisations and communities have a meaningful role in shaping the services delivered to them.

While much of our focus is on advocating for our communities, significant work is also happening behind the scenes to strengthen the Voice itself. In many respects, we are still building this institution while carrying out our responsibilities. This includes the work gone into reflecting on the experiences of the 2026 elections, engaging with the Remuneration Tribunal on arrangements that better reflect the responsibilities and realities of the role of the Voice, and we are currently preparing for an independent, Aboriginal-led review of the First Nations Voice Act, whilst continuing to develop an evaluation and accountability framework to measure impact and progress.

These are not small pieces of work. Each could influence how the Voice operates, how it is supported, how it is held accountable and how it develops into the future. These processes can strengthen our foundation and ensure the Voice's structure, resourcing and accountability reflect our work and our future effectiveness and independence.

The review of the act provides an opportunity to consider the lessons we have learned, the work we have undertaken, and the structures and arrangements that will best support the Voice moving forward. The experiences and evidence from all these pieces of work should inform that review. These processes are interconnected. What we have learned through the work of the Voice, the challenges we have encountered and the responsibilities we have taken on should all inform our structures and supports.

At times, it can feel like just as we are finding our feet something changes. We are establishing new ways of working, navigating new processes, adapting to evolving arrangements and helping shape the very structures within which we operate. Unlike established government

institutions, we are learning and building these foundations while being expected to deliver on them. It is challenging, but also an important opportunity. We are not simply waiting for others to decide what the Voice should look like; we are actively shaping an institution that is fit for purpose and responsive to our mob, our communities.

We know that the Voice will continue to evolve and the decisions made now will shape its effectiveness, independence and sustainability for years to come, and all of this is happening while we continue to meet our responsibilities to communities, engage with government and advocate for the changes that brought us here in the first place. Because the true measure of the Voice will not be the number of meetings we attend, the submissions we make or the statements we release. It will be whether our work helps others, whether it helps Aboriginal people in South Australia, whether it helps their communities and whether it helps us all and helps our state as a whole. That is the responsibility entrusted to us and one we must continue to honour with purpose, determination and respect for the communities we represent. Thank you.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

The PRESIDENT of the Legislative Council (Hon. R.B. Martin): Thank you for your address, Mr Bilney.

Mr LEEROY BILNEY (Joint Presiding Member of the State First Nations Voice): Now I will present the Joint Sitting of Parliament First Nations Voice Annual Report 2026.

The PRESIDENT of the Legislative Council (Hon. R.B. Martin): Thank you. I now declare the Joint Sitting closed.