**In the dark on detail**

On the 21 May 2022, Prime Minster elect Albanese took the stage for his victory speech and declared that under his leadership there would be a referendum held on an Indigenous Voice to Parliament within his first term in Government.

The problem is we don’t know what the Voice is or what it is intended to achieve.

This was, of course, a process that begun back in 1999 when then-Prime Minister John Howard sought to recognise First Nations people in the preamble of the Australian Constitution. A referendum on the issue was held and lost that year.

Fast forward to 2017 and The Uluru Statement from the Heart was closely followed by a recommendation that the constitution be amended to establish a “Voice to Parliament” – a national Indigenous representative assembly composed of and chosen exclusively by First Nations Australians.

Later that same year, the Coalition Government established a joint select committee to examine the proposal further, and in 2019 the Coalition Government announced the beginning of the Indigenous Voice co-design process.

While the Coalition has a long history of progressing this issue, many Members, like myself, are still waiting to see final details.

Who will be on this body? How will they be chosen? What functions will they have? And most importantly, how will this body have a direct and positive impact on our First Nations community.

Before pledging my support, I’d like to know that a Voice to Parliament is going to do that and how. I want to ensure it is not another Labor experiment like pink batts, over-priced school halls or cash for clunkers.

I’m yet to see how a Voice would deliver practical outcomes for First Nations people, because what exactly the Albanese Government will put forward to the people at a referendum is still unknown.

What the Prime Minister presented to the people at the Garma Festival earlier this month was deliberately vague, saying much of the detail about the structure of the Voice would not be known until after the referendum. A ‘vote first, details second’ approach, openly acknowledging shortly after that “getting into every detail is not a recipe for success”. I disagree. Furthermore I think its poor leadership.

Polling done earlier this month on the issue says 65 percent are in support of a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament and yet only 34 percent know what the Voice is, and 65 percent say they don’t know anything about the detail!

Generally speaking, Australia is a constitutionally conservative nation.

I’m also a strong proponent of having an informed citizenry.

I’m not currently persuaded of the merits of change because I haven’t seen the necessary detail of what these changes entail. Moreover, there would need to be a strong rationale for change to be enshrined in the constitution as opposed to legislated. Legislation that could be changed should that become necessary without the expense and inconvenience of a referendum. Being kept in the dark on detail does nothing to encourage constitutional change from a constitutional conservative like myself, and I doubt it will see a majority of people in a majority of states in a constitutionally conservative nation do so either.

Referendums, once lost, take a very long time to revive.

This will be one of the biggest questions put to the Australian people in more than half a century.

I’m waiting for these details before I can make an informed decision about my vote. You should too.