

# Australia's Duplicity in Indigenous Rights: A Tale of Land vs. Recognition

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*Cover Image Attribute: People stand in line to participate in voting outside the polling station located at Old Parliament House in Canberra, Australia, on October 14, 2023. / Source: EFE/EPA/LUKAS COCH*

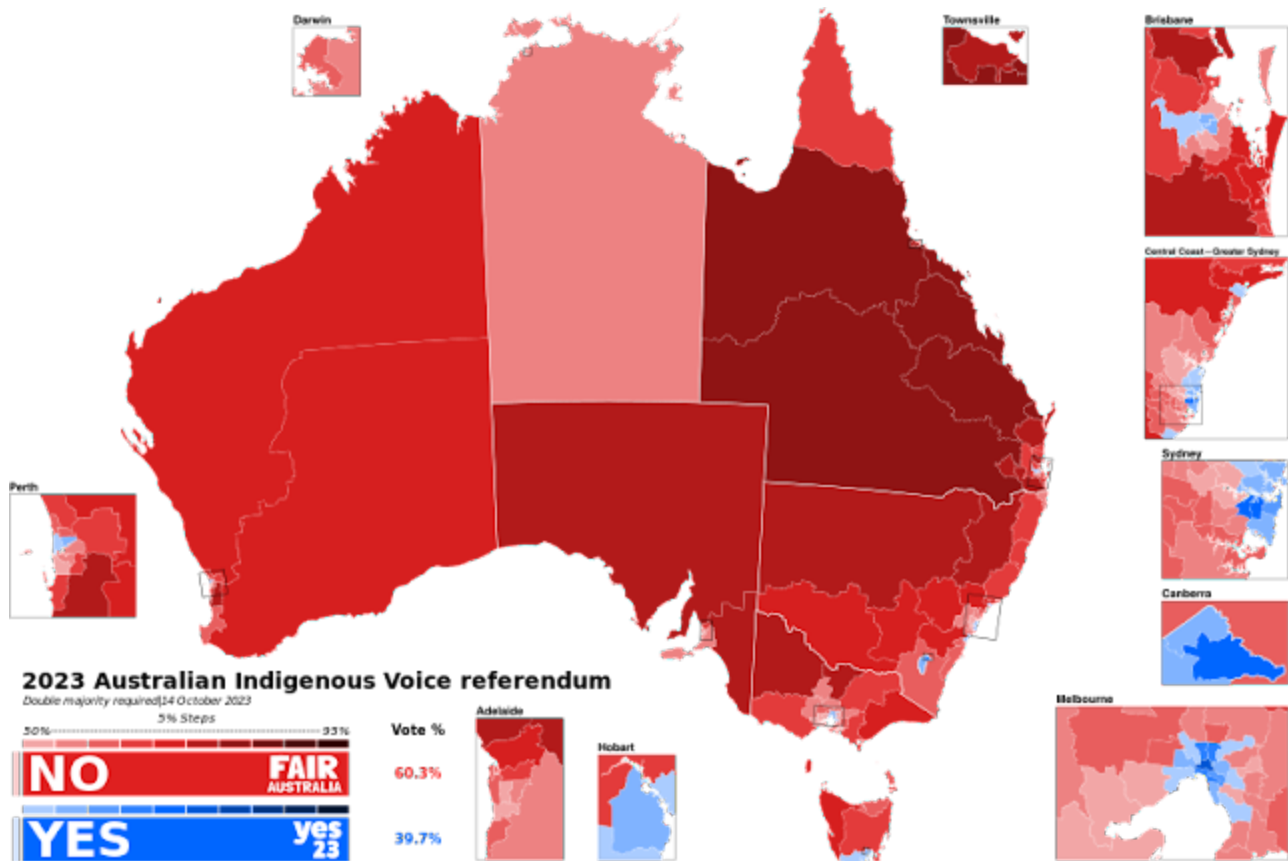
In the vast tapestry of human rights, Australia stands as a nation with a unique duality concerning the rights of its indigenous population. On one hand, it prides itself on its commitment to the rights of Indigenous people, and on the other, it rejects its recognition within the very fabric of the nation, its Constitution. This duplicity was starkly highlighted by Adani's Carmichael coal mining project, where **Indigenous rights over land and heritage took center stage** while simultaneously, the nation rejected constitutional recognition for its

Indigenous citizens, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. This contradiction illuminates a complex and troubling paradox in Australia's treatment of its First Nations peoples.

The Adani Carmichael coal mining project became emblematic of Australia's struggle to reconcile its economic interests with its responsibility to protect Indigenous rights. The project's potential impact on Indigenous communities' land and cultural heritage, particularly the Wangan and Jagalingou people, was a rallying point for environmentalists, Indigenous activists, and concerned citizens. In large numbers, Australians came together to protect the land, recognizing the inherent connection of Indigenous people to their ancestral territories.

This outpouring of support for Indigenous rights was inspiring, emphasizing the strength of the Australian people's desire to stand up for justice and equity. It demonstrated that when faced with issues concerning land and heritage, Australians were ready to practice the principles of reconciliation and social justice.

However, this positive sentiment starkly contrasts the rejection of Indigenous recognition in the Australian Constitution. The nation recently faced **a divisive and racially-tinged referendum campaign** that ended with a disappointing result. The proposal to amend the country's 122-year-old Constitution to formally acknowledge the Indigenous peoples, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, failed to garner sufficient support.



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**Map Attribute: 2023 Australian Voice Referendum By Division / Source: Matthew McMullin, Wikimedia Commons**

This rejection is more than just a missed opportunity; it is a reflection of a deeper issue in Australia's national consciousness. While many Australians are willing to acknowledge Indigenous rights concerning land and heritage when it suits their environmental or moral compass, the commitment to recognizing Indigenous peoples as an integral part of the nation remains contentious.

It is crucial to understand that constitutional recognition is symbolic and about validating Indigenous peoples' history, culture, and heritage. It is about moving forward as a nation and addressing the past wrongs committed against Indigenous communities. This recognition could pave the way for meaningful reconciliation and a more inclusive and equitable Australia.

The duplicity in Australia's treatment of its Indigenous population is a glaring paradox. While Australians claim to be champions of Indigenous rights in the face of the Adani project, they simultaneously resist enshrining these rights in their nation's founding document. This incongruity between words and actions undermines the nation's credibility on the international stage, as it fails to uphold the standards it claims to endorse.

To resolve this contradiction, Australia must embark on a path of genuine reconciliation that recognizes Indigenous peoples not just in instances of environmental concern but in the very essence of the nation. It requires the Australian government and its citizens to commit to constitutional recognition, to address the historical injustices, and to foster a future where Indigenous voices and experiences are fully integrated into the national narrative.

Australia's duplicity in handling Indigenous people's rights is a painful paradox that must be confronted. The nation should consistently commit to justice and reconciliation concerning land and heritage or constitutional recognition. True progress requires a comprehensive recognition of the First Nations people, not just when it is convenient, but as an enduring and integral part of Australia's identity.

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