

# MEDIA RELEASE

25 May 2017



## When a nation votes Yes, history is written and a chatbot is born

Fifty years on from the 1967 referendum – when more than 90 per cent of Australians voted ‘Yes’ in support of Indigenous rights – the story is being kept alive via a new messaging chatbot run through Facebook’s Messenger app.

The Museum of Australian Democracy (MoAD) at Old Parliament House in Canberra is linking the past with the future via a chatbot that delivers information about the 1967 referendum in bite-sized pieces.

Ms Marni Pilgrim, Digital Engagement Manager at MoAD, says the museum delivers content in ways relevant to its audience, with the chatbot another example of this.

“Using a chatbot as a visitor engagement tool is innovative amongst Australia’s cultural institutions. It acts like history in your pocket and is helping MoAD spark a conversation about the significance of the 1967 referendum. We’re hoping it will be an effective way for people to get the facts, hear Indigenous perspectives on the referendum and reflect on its continuing relevance today,” says Ms Pilgrim.

“We also know that our online audience have a real thirst for content about Indigenous rights and frequently see this content perform well across social media and our website. The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the referendum presented an opportunity to share the importance of this national milestone in a way many of our visitors hadn’t experienced before – in a messaging app on their phone.”

Mr Michael Evans, Senior Political Historian at MoAD, says that inspiration for the chatbot came from the realisation that many people were not familiar with the 1967 referendum and what it represented.

“The story of the referendum is just as relevant today as it was 50 years ago. We hope the chatbot encourages people to reflect on what it took to get over 90 per cent of the population to vote ‘Yes’ and what is still to be done today,” says Mr Evans.

“The chatbot also supports the launch of a new exhibition, *Yes: The Ongoing Story of the 1967 Referendum*, and extends the exhibition’s reach beyond the building’s walls, enabling people to access valuable information about the referendum wherever they are.”

The 1967 referendum was one of the nation-defining decisions that took place while Old Parliament House served as the home of Federal Parliament. It was in the building’s offices, party rooms and chambers that crucial conversations and debates took place around the proposed changes to the Constitution. The changes would allow Aboriginal people to be counted in the national census and the Commonwealth government to make laws for them.

How to use the 1967 Referendum Chatbot:

1. Open the Facebook Messenger app on your iPhone or Android device.
2. Search for the *Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House* and tap us.
3. Tap the Get started button.

**The 1967 Referendum Chatbot** will be available from Thursday 25 May. The initiative is part of celebrations to mark the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Old Parliament House, and with it an important 90-year chapter in Australia’s democratic history.

**Yes: The Ongoing Story of the 1967 Referendum** is a joint exhibition by the Museum of Australian Democracy, the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and Reconciliation

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Australia. It is on display from 25 May 2017 at the Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House, open 9am to 5pm daily. Entry is free after museum admission. For more information visit: [www.moadoph.gov.au](http://www.moadoph.gov.au)

**Ends**

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For further information, interviews or photo opportunities, please contact Alice Brown: [alice.brown@moadoph.gov.au](mailto:alice.brown@moadoph.gov.au), (02) 6270 8120 or 0410 997 741.

## Interview opportunities

- Marni Pilgrim, Digital Engagement Manager, Museum of Australian Democracy
- Michael Evans, Senior Political Historian, Museum of Australian Democracy