



We need to own change: Wyatt

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KEN Wyatt, the country's first indigenous federal member of parliament, has lashed out at government agencies that fail to engage with indigenous communities.

Mr Wyatt, the Coalition's newly appointed chairman of the committee for constitutional change for indigenous recognition, said Aboriginal communities were suffering from a fixed mindset within the public service that failed to recognise the need to have a "flexible" approach to indigenous policy.

"We still face the mindset of things having to be done to us," Mr Wyatt said yesterday, speaking in Adelaide on the sixth anniversary of the national apology to the Stolen Generations.

"We still face challenges in reshaping what it is that best suits our communities.

"What I hope that (we) will

achieve in the future. . . (is) that when governments shape policy that what they do is they consider how their bureaucracies will implement that policy, that they will instruct them to work and negotiate with Aboriginal people so that we can change the course of what was, to what can be."

Mr Wyatt said he was frustrated that bureaucrats often rigidly ignored community input into policy ideas, condemning programs to failure.

"We have to create a mindset within government agencies to change the way they do business.

"People on the ground know the practical solutions that will work, and will engage them. The community being involved means they will own it. We have got to change the they-know-best attitude (of bureaucrats)."

Mr Wyatt also spoke on the im-

portance of changing the Constitution to include recognition of indigenous Australians, but admitted it was a "daunting" task. "It will not end my passion to see us recognised as peers within the Constitution", he said.

"The conversations of 1901 and the early 1890s had meant that we were left out of the thoughts of our founding fathers. We have the opportunity, the unique opportunity, to have recognition within the Constitution."

Mr Wyatt is holding hearings on constitutional change as chairman of a joint select committee co-chaired with Labor senator Nova Peris. The committee has been tasked with consulting on the model for constitutional change, and is expected to report throughout the year.

