

THE AUSTRALIAN

Premiers Jay Weatherill and Campbell Newman unite to push recognition plebiscite

PATRICIA KARVELAS THE AUSTRALIAN SEPTEMBER 02, 2014 12:00AM

SOUTH Australian Premier Jay Weatherill has written to Queensland Premier Campbell Newman to request that a referendum to acknowledge indigenous Australians is a priority item for the Council for the Australian Federation, arguing states should urge the Abbott government to fix a date for the vote.

Mr Newman has agreed to the request.

In the letter, obtained by The Australian, Mr Weatherill says that for a referendum to be successful the states need to be strong supporters.

He has asked for the issue to be debated at the meeting on October 9.

In the letter Mr Weatherill says he met with the Constitutional Recognition Review Panel which, in particular, is assessing the readiness of states and territories to support a national referendum on this issue and is considering the form of proposed constitutional amendments most likely to receive support.

“I am aware that some states have already taken various complementary actions. For example, in March 2013 we amended the South Australian Constitution to give formal recognition to Aboriginal peoples. However, this has not occurred across all jurisdictions,” the letter states.

“I consider that, through CAF, all states may wish to make a statement of support for the national referendum. CAF may also consider requesting that the commonwealth fix a date for the referendum so that jurisdictions can plan and take all necessary steps to ensure they are appropriately prepared, and to maximise the prospects of a successful referendum outcome.”

Labor MPs are putting pressure on Tony Abbott to become more active in pushing and leading the referendum.

Stephen Jones, a Labor member of the joint parliamentary committee looking at recognition, said there could be an early referendum if the parliament made it a priority, which it had so far failed to do.

And Labor’s first indigenous MP and deputy chairwoman of the committee looking at wording for the change, senator Nova Peris, yesterday challenged Mr Abbott to do more. “It is up to the Prime Minister to lead in this matter and for him to determine when the referendum will be held,” Senator Peris said.

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