

## What is the Local and Regional Indigenous Voice Framework?

### Purpose

To enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in every community to have a **greater say in public policy, programs and service delivery affecting their lives through shared decision making in partnership with governments.**

### How will it be achieved?

Regional governance structures are established as Local and Regional Voices, building on relevant arrangements in place that work well.

Local and Regional Voices engage with all levels of government through a partnership interface to provide advice and engage in planning and shared decision making on policies, programs and services affecting communities, based on community aspirations and priorities.

### Context

The *Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition* found Local and Regional Voices should provide a forum for dialogue between Indigenous Australians and governments on policy, programs and services, and draw on the varying practices of communities rather than a 'one size fits all' model.

The Local & Regional Co-design Group's task is to articulate preferred approaches to improved local and regional decision making and Indigenous regional governance, and provide advice on preferred options.

To achieve this, the Group has developed this principles-based framework that:

- draws on what is working well in local and regional decision-making across the country
- is flexible enough to build on these approaches and accommodate diverse communities
- provides a platform for enhanced, effective and sustainable engagement between communities and governments on the ground
- connects communities and regions to a National Voice

### Scope

Functions of Local and Regional Voices are expected to evolve over time along this spectrum, depending on their preferences and capacity.

#### Advice to governments and others

- Provide advice to all levels of government on community aspirations, priorities and challenges to influence policy, program and service responses (including mainstream)
- Draw on knowledge of local Indigenous organisations and sector experts to develop advice and enhance their voice to governments
- Provide advice to non-government sector (e.g. business, corporate)

#### Shared decision making

- Work with all levels of government to undertake strategic regional planning based on the aspirations, priorities and challenges of communities in the region
- Agree how investment and service delivery (including mainstream) will align to this shared agenda
- Co-design strategies, services, delivery, monitoring and evaluation

#### National engagement

- Provide advice to the National Voice on systemic issues associated with national policies and programs, and matters of national importance
- Clear, two-way flow of advice and communication between levels of an Indigenous Voice
- Communication with state/territory level representative bodies (where they exist)

#### Out of scope

- Administration of programs & funding
- Noting shared work with governments on priority setting, influencing funding decisions to better align investment to priorities and procurement planning are in scope*

#### Community engagement

- Provide clear pathways for community members (includes all individuals, families, groups, organisations and traditional owners with ties to the local area) to contribute input and feedback loop with the voice structure

### Principles

These guide Local and Regional Voices, government arrangements, and the partnership interface arrangements.

#### ★ Empowerment

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have greater control and voice in their own affairs – a self-determination approach. Governments shift to an enabling role. Arrangements are culturally safe.

#### ★ Inclusive Participation

- All have the opportunity to have a say, including traditional owners and historical residents. Arrangements are broad-based and support respectful engagement across a diversity of voices – individuals, communities and organisations.

#### ★ Cultural Leadership

- Voice arrangements strongly connect to cultural leaders in a way that is appropriate for each community and region. Communities determine how this principle interacts with the Inclusive Participation principle in their context.

#### ★ Community-led Design

- Voice arrangements are determined by communities according to local context, history and culture. Community ownership gives authorisation and mandate to voice structures. Communities determine implementation pace; governments support and enable this.

#### ★ Non-duplication and Links with Existing Bodies

- Voice structures build on and leverage existing approaches wherever possible, with some adaptation and evolution as needed to improve the arrangements. Voices will link to other existing bodies, not duplicate or undermine their roles.

#### ★ Respectful Long-term Partnerships

- Governments and voices commit to mutually respectful and enduring partnership, supported by structured interface. Governments are responsive and proactive. Governments support building capacity and expertise of voice structures and implement system changes.

#### ★ Transparency and Accountability

- Governments and voice structures adhere to clear protocols and share responsibility and accountability, including downward to communities.

#### ★ Capability Driven

- Voice arrangements match the unique capabilities and strengths of each community and region. Governments and communities both build their capability to work in partnership and support local leadership development.

#### ★ Data and Evidence-based Decision Making

- Data is shared between governments and communities to enable evidence based advice and shared decision making. Communities are supported to collect and manage their own data.

## How does this work in practice?



### Local and Regional Voice governance structure

- Communities in a region decide how best to organise themselves in alignment with the principles and based on their context
- Local communities and groups have clear pathways to participate and connect to their regional structure in a way that works for them – this is referred to as the 'Local and Regional Voice'
- Each region decides how best to draw its voice members (i.e. election, nomination/selection, drawing on structures based in traditional law and custom, or a combination) and how many voice members there will be
- Existing local/regional bodies (i.e. advisory bodies, statutory and land rights bodies, ACCOs etc.) link in without their roles being duplicated or undermined
- **Minimum expectations:** Meeting Inclusive Participation, Cultural Leadership and Transparency and Accountability principles



### Regional partnership interface (e.g. 'partnership table')

- Local and Regional Voices and governments come together to share advice and decision making on community priorities
- Clear protocols to guide this
- Scope may evolve over time, depending on preferences of community and capabilities of all partners



### All levels of government

- Clear and formalised commitments from all governments to participate
- All levels of government come together in a coordinated way
- Each government coordinates across its portfolios and agencies, including mainstream, to get the right people involved
- Requires systemic transformation of government 'ways of doing business'
- **Minimum expectations:** Formally committing to Respectful Long-term Partnerships, Transparency and Accountability and Data and Evidence-based Decision Making principles

### Link to National Voice

Provide advice on systemic national issues to National Voice and communicate with state/territory representative bodies (where they exist)

One possible option for National Voice membership is to draw members from Local and Regional Voices. This will be **determined after Stage 2**

## What are the steps to get there?

### Regions are determined



It is proposed there will be between 25-35 regions nationally. Once the number is **finalised after Stage 2**, a breakdown will be provided for each state and territory. Communities and governments in each state/territory then work together to determine the detail of regions in their jurisdiction, based on agreed parameters and guidance.

### Transition to voice structures



Transition pathways will look different in each community and region depending on the extent of any existing arrangements that can be built on. Where limited or no similar arrangements exist to build on, 'transitional groups' with a broad range of stakeholders can be established to design the voice arrangements. Further guidance materials will be **developed in Stage 2**.

### Formal recognition of voice structures

- Recognition will be based on meeting minimum expectations
- Details of the mechanism (either an independent panel assessment or joint assessment between communities and relevant governments) will be **developed for the final report**

### Implementation detail

- Options for dispute resolution, decision making protocols (majority/consensus), nomination/eligibility of members (e.g. 'fit and proper' person), codes of conduct, etc. will be **progressed during Stage 2**

### Formal government commitment

- This will embed the approach and give it authority
- Legislation at the Commonwealth level, with formal agreement by state/territory (ideally through matching legislation) and local governments
- Options to be **developed during Stage 2** and finalised after the final report