



Potential for a National Voice Independent Indigenous Policy Body



As part of the Indigenous Voice co-design process, the National Co-design Group is seeking feedback on whether an independent Indigenous policy body should be included in the final proposal for a National Voice. It is currently an optional element of the National Voice proposal.



Key features

Under the National Voice proposal, an independent Indigenous policy body could have the following characteristics:

- It could be a new Commonwealth agency, fully separate to the National Voice, as a complementary organisation.
- It could provide expert policy advice on policy issues relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- It could be fully independent of both the Australian Government and National Voice in its research, analysis and development of its advice. The body might also initiate its own inquiries.
- The Australian Parliament, Government and the National Voice would all be able to refer matters to the body for advice. The body could be required to provide advice on the matter.
- The Australian Government and the National Voice could be required to agree on all membership appointments to the body.



Design features of a potential independent Indigenous policy body

The National Co-design Group considered proposed detail for an independent Indigenous policy body option. The body could be similar to the Productivity Commission in terms of independent policy research, inquiries and advice.

Structure

- Membership of the policy body could be made up of Indigenous members, with non-Indigenous associate members.
- The Australian Government and the National Voice would mutually agree to membership appointments.
- Members would be selected on the basis of their subject matter expertise.
- The body could be set up by legislation, which would guarantee the body's independence.

Functions

- The body would inquire into issues referred by the Australian Parliament, Australian Government, National Voice, or that the body itself chooses. This means there would be partial alignment between the agenda of the policy body and the agenda of the National Voice. Other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations could also be given an opportunity to request research and a report on a particular policy matter through the National Voice.
- The policy focus would be on issues relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Examples could include land, social services, justice and so on. This could include monitoring the effectiveness of programs and supporting Indigenous advancement.
- The body could make findings solely based on its own research and analysis, report back to the Australian Parliament, Australian Government, or National Voice, and publish its reports.



Views of the Co-design Groups

The National Co-design Group identified the following pros and cons for including an independent policy body in the National Voice proposal.



Pros

- Because the body would be independent, it might be viewed as a trusted source of advice, with a high regard for the rigour and independence of any policy work it might produce. This could also strengthen the advice of the National Voice where their advice is aligned.
- The body could create a solid structure for building expertise and conducting research into Indigenous policy issues. The body would be led by experts, who would be able to set its strategic direction.
- The members of this policy body being chosen for their subject matter expertise, would complement the members of the National Voice who would be community representatives.



Cons

- Setting up a separate new entity would be costly and might make the National Voice proposal more complicated.
- The National Voice could be able to access its own expert advice, without any additional body. The National Co-design Group agreed that there should be a mechanism for a panel of experts which the proposed National Voice could call upon as needed.
- There could be actual or perceived duplication with existing sources of expert advice, for example the Indigenous Productivity Commissioner.
- The body would not necessarily agree with the National Voice all the time and could be perceived as a rival. It also might not always look at issues that are priorities for the National Voice.

Both the National Co-design Group and the Senior Advisory Group considered the pros and cons set out above during stage one of the Indigenous Voice co-design process.

The majority view of the National Co-design Group was a preference not to support the option for an independent Indigenous policy body in the Indigenous Voice proposals. But they agreed the option should be included to allow further discussion and to seek community views.

The Senior Advisory Group did not support the option for an independent Indigenous policy body. The Senior Advisory Group was particularly concerned about perceived duplication with other existing bodies and the proposed National Voice. They also agreed that other elements of the proposed National Voice created the right framework without the need for a separate policy body. This includes the inclusion of an expert panel, a disability advisory group and a youth advisory group.



Proposed National Voice access to advice

The proposed National Voice would have many sources of information to inform its advice to the Australian Parliament and Government. These include:

- Local and Regional Voices
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, for example peak bodies
- Australian Government agencies.

The options for the National Voice also include elements to support policy and expert input, in particular:

- Youth and disability advisory groups
- Access to a panel of experts to draw on as needed
- The ability to set up committees to look at specific issues and bring in the right voices.

The proposed independent Indigenous policy body, if adopted, would be additional to these elements.