

Indigenous Voice Community Consultation

Consultation session details

Dharawal Country,

9.00am, 9 March 2021, Campbelltown (Western Sydney), Session 1

Number of participants: 15

Key points raised

Please note, this is a summary of the discussion and the views and opinions expressed by participants in consultations sessions. It is not intended to be an exhaustive summary of all points raised, but draws out the key points.


The morning session was attended by 15 participants who were welcomed to country by Aunty Glenda Chalker. Key points discussed are summarised below.

There was an initial discussion on the marketing and attendance for the session:

- Some participants felt that the word about the session was not out there, that there needed to be a greater lead time and information channels such as land council networks and the local paper should be used.
- In response to a query about how long ago NSWALC was notified about the consultation sessions, a senior NIAA official indicated the information was provided to them about two weeks ago, after that NIAA did not have visibility of distribution to individual LALCs.
- Other participants felt that there was apathy in the community about the consultations and that people were not attending despite being encouraged to do so.

Discussion around the Local and Regional Voice proposal included:

- There was a general support for the approach, including the principles, flexibility, the need for local level community driven arrangements, non-duplication and complementing and building on what already exists.
- There was a clear sense that this is important and needed to be progressed now.
- Participants felt that the challenge was engagement and that it was hard to get people involved. One participant felt that just local voices could work instead of regional.
- Participants brought up the issue of money and resourcing as one that needs to be addressed, as usually the Indigenous Australians are at the table for free (volunteers), when others are paid to be there.
- Participants discussed at some length what already exists in this region, including organisations and stakeholders, and what could constitute the region.
- One participant felt that 25-35 regions nationally doesn't account for arrangements in smaller areas that are working well.
- One participant felt that Dharawal country could be one region (consisting of Campbelltown, Camden, Macarthur, Wollondilly and surrounding areas). Others felt that this could be the 'local region' that feeds into a larger regional body.

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- One participant felt that larger regions for Eastern NSW could be Greater Sydney, North Coast, Central Coast and South Coast.
 - Participants expressed concerns about how to ensure governments really listen to the Local and Regional Voices. They noted that State and Federal governments don't usually don't talk to each other, and participants felt it would be difficult for them to agree on priorities.
 - One participant felt that the land council model of talking to the community works, and if you've got something that is working well, continue it and expand it.
 - It was acknowledged that implementing Local and Regional Voices will take a while, but that it should be established in less than 2 years.
 - One participant felt that the Local and Regional Voices proposal is the exact model that is required and that it should be implemented quickly. It was also commented that it needs good governance and the involvement of all, including the youth and Elders.
 - It was noted that while it is easy to come up with principles but it's very hard to implement them. However, participants felt that proposed principles provide relevant guidance, and the idea of flexibility is good.
 - The general consensus was that representation on the ground to make decisions is what needed and is important.
 - Some participants felt that the NSW Local Decision Making model was a good model.

Discussion around the National Voice proposals included:

- Participants were very supportive of the gender balance among members and felt that representatives from different age groups would work well for National Voice members.
- Participants generally favoured having National Voice members from Local and Regional Voices rather than the elected option as they would know their communities and the skilled people who would be suitable for the roles. There was a concern with elected model as members would have no connection to Local and Regional Voices, while the linked option would bring greater accountability from the National Voice to Local and Regional Voices.
- Other concerns about the elected model included that it could turn into a popularity contest, create another point of view, and provide for members to be drawn from large population centres such as Sydney.
- Participants expressed the view it was most important to get the right people at the local level, as it was about their community and their voice. There was a need for representatives to have the relevant skills (eg, negotiation and representation). A potential expression of interest process was discussed where they meet certain criteria in order to be eligible to be selected.
- One participant felt that elections in NSW would be the way to get National Voice members, however it was acknowledged that it would be very difficult to get people to vote.
- There was a discussion on the possibility of an ethics committee, with one participant noting it sounded similar to Congress.
- A view was expressed about the importance of constitutional enshrinement, including questioning how it could be ensured that the National Voice would be effective without it. In this regard, participants expressed a view that more public messaging from the Minister and from Government is needed.

Other issues raised included:

- A discussion on land councils, including views that they are established but have no power and have representatives but they are rarely seen by community.
- A discussion on the need of Indigenous organisations with capacity to deliver services in the region.
- Participants were conscious of not putting added pressure on existing organisations and expectations to deliver on programs outside of their remit through the Voice process. It was clarified the proposals do not include Voices delivering services.
- Participants brought up challenges in the past with Closing the Gap targets and expectations, but acknowledged the importance of celebrating success stories.

