

Indigenous Voice Community Consultation

Consultation session details

Ngunnawal and Ngambri country

Canberra, 30 March 2021, 9.30am-12.30pm, Session 1

Number of participants: 13

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 session was attended by 13 participants. Key points discussed are summarised below.

Overarching points

- Participants provided feedback on various proposed elements of the Indigenous Voice, including some of the Local & Regional Voice principles, proposed number of Local & Regional Voices, the two-way link between Local & Regional Voices and the National Voice and the proposed structure of the National Voice.
- Key points raised included ensuring grassroots engagement through both tiers of the Indigenous Voice, ensuring no voices are excluded due to other more dominant voices in communities, and a dedication to gender balance throughout the Indigenous Voice structures.

Local & Regional Voice

- One participant noted there is a tension between the cultural leadership and nonduplication principles, that in the cut and thrust of processes at work, these two elements could be used to cherry pick, ignoring particular bodies/organisations. It was noted there are many discussions taking place at all levels, including with state and territory governments and communities, and that if the Indigenous Voice is established there would continue to be many discussions following the current consultation process, particularly in relation to how Local & Regional Voices would be set up in each region.
- Another participant queried how the principle of cultural leadership would work in a place like the ACT, given many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people residing here have moved here and are not Traditional Owners. It was emphasised that existing organisations, such as the Ngunnawal Elders Council, would continue to exist and be providing advice to government, but that there may also be provision to form committees to bring different groups together to give advice, including up to the National Voice.
- The same participant suggested gender equitable leadership was an important element to include in the Local & Regional Voice level in addition to the National Voice.
- In relation to the proposed 25-35 Local & Regional Voices nationally, one participant suggested increasing the numbers. The participant shared that they had looked at a lot of state/regional planning models to see how NSW could incorporate cultural burning into its fire risk management plans. The participant noted the work led to the inclusion of adjunct seats for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in bushfire coordinating committees, of which there are five across the NSW regions, supported by about 60 different local land and planning management committees. These aim to ensure the communities that really understand country are



able to best plan for contingencies and be able to respond operationally when fires occur. The participant suggested this shows there is merit in having a higher number of local bodies including local councils underpinning Local & Regional Voices, because of the principle of connection to country. It was noted that within each region there will be flexibility for a large number of local voices to advise a Local & Regional Voice.

- There was some discussion about the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body (ATSIEB) and whether or not it would become the Local & Regional Voice for the ACT region.
- Alternatively, one participant suggested that ACT might be included in a broader regional grouping along cultural boundaries encompassing some nearby NSW regions.
- It was queried whether some of the National Voice mechanisms in the federal Parliament would be replicated in state/territory parliaments. It was confirmed that this is what was intended but that would be a decision of state and territory governments. It was noted that further discussions were needed to progress this.
- Another participant observed that the coordination of local and regional views on national issues would require significant resourcing, and queried whether regional voices would be supported by a secretariat. If so, whether it would be staffed exclusively by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It was confirmed that a secretariat is part of the design of the Local & Regional Voices, and that all of their secretariats would probably not be exclusively staffed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, but that it would be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people determining the staffing for their regions.

National Voice

- There was agreement among several participants that it would be beneficial for ACT to have two National Voice members, to ensure gender balance.
- It was also noted the voices of people who identify as LGBTQ+ should also be heard.
- One participant queried whether there had been any reflections on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) structure and set up, in the design of the proposed National Voice. It was confirmed that co-design members had considered the lessons from ATSIC and other previous initiatives. In addition to this they drew on the reflections of some members who had been involved in ATSIC as either staff or Commissioners.
- There was general agreement that an Ethics Council would be good to include in the design of the National Voice. Similar to the National Congress Ethics Council, this could be a mechanism to manage issues arising out of lateral violence, and to ensure National Voice members were working on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people rather than any other particular organisations or bodies to whom members are also attached. One participant noted that an Ethics Council is a good idea, but that its processes must be transparent.
- One participant asked if the National Voice would be split up to mirror the way in which the federal Cabinet is split up in terms of portfolio responsibilities (e.g. the health portfolio, the education portfolio). It was confirmed this had not been considered, that primarily the National Voice would be prioritising engagement on issues which have the most impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Participants reflected on two proposed transparency mechanisms – statements of consultation and a parliamentary committee to review the statements, which would be attached to legislation introduced to the Parliament. There was general agreement that these would be good inclusions in the design.
- One participant raised the issue of appointments, and questioned whether they could be used to add experts to the National Voice. It was confirmed that they would not, because experts could be called upon to assist with particular laws, policies and proposals through the creation by the National Voice of ad hoc committees. Instead, it was advised the appointments, agreed between the National Voice and the Minister, could be used to ensure coverage of the diversity of voices amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- The participant also queried how grassroots voices would be able to find their way up to the National Voice. It was confirmed that the National Voice would be working with Local & Regional Voices to get to grassroots views. It was emphasised that this was a two-way flow between both levels of the Indigenous Voice.
- One participant commented that, in relation to the way membership to the National Voice is determined, he had no strong views on whether Core Model 1 (structurally linked to Local & Regional Voices) or Core Model 2 (direct elections) was better, although he tended to prefer Core Model 2. The participant suggested that



either way, there were pros and cons to both models, and whichever model was progressed, it would be important to recognise the benefits lost with the other model, and remedial steps taken to make up for it.

- Another participant queried whether the National Voice would be able to proactively take issues to the Parliament, whether the relationship would be on a two-way basis. It was confirmed that this is what is being envisioned.
- One participant asked how the National Voice’s work might interrelate to state-based treaty work. It was confirmed there was no interplay envisioned insofar as state-based treaty work, although state and territory governments might consult Local & Regional Voices on those issues.