



Indigenous Voice Community Consultation

Consultation session details

Wiradjuri Country,

Wagga Wagga, 16 March 2021, 9.30am, session 1


Number of participants: 11

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 11 participants who were welcomed to country by Aunty Isabel Reid. Key points discussed are summarised below.

- Participants saw the Indigenous Voice as a new opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to amplify their voices and shape the future. They felt that this was an opportunity that the community needs to make the most of.
- Participants emphasised it is important to show strong support and that many people need to be involved in the process. There were concerns that the community had not been given enough notice for people to attend. They observed that not everyone can attend a meeting during business hours. Engaging with year 11 and year 12 students was identified as an important opportunity.
- In response to these concerns, the NIAA Secretariat will organise another session in the Riverina region within the next few weeks, outside of business hours. Following a suggestion from participants, the Secretariat will also share resources with participants such as short videos used in the session so that they could pass them on to their networks and encourage further engagement with the process.
- Participants reflected on the struggles of previous generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in getting to this point. They noted that the current process can learn from the past, including the successful campaign for the 1967 referendum, and ATSIC arrangements.
- Participants reflected on how different communities are organised. They observed that there are many existing Aboriginal organisations in Wagga Wagga, but fewer in Coolamon. They reflected on what this means for Local and Regional Voices – in some places, it means building on what exists already and avoiding consultation burn out. In other places, it means starting conversations about how to set up new arrangements in the community.

- 
- The proposed number of regions was discussed, including suggestion that 25-35 range may be too low. It was clarified that the number of ATSIC regions informed the proposal and that communities will be asked further for their views about specific regional areas and boundaries later on in the process.
 - It was noted Local and Regional Voice proposals drew on positive learnings from ATSIC and models such as Murdi Paaki – for example, regional planning.
 - A suggestion was put forward about supporting connections across larger regions by having a forum every 6 or 12 months to bring together community members from across the region and involve them in the conversation (yarning circles, workshops) about priorities and what the voice should focus on.
 - Participants expressed a strong view that Local & Regional Voices should be appropriately resourced by governments.
 - Participants observed that the National Voice proposal reflected a “bottom up” approach based on strong linkages with Local and Regional Voices. They supported the need for the National Voice establishing transparent processes to communicate what information has been provided by different Local & Regional Voices, and how that information has been used.
 - Participants discussed how disagreement might be addressed by the National Voice. They reflected on the opportunity for deliberations to reach a consensus, and the value of resolving issues at the appropriate level (national, regional or local). Participants strongly felt that the Indigenous Voice needed to be unified, and not divided by factionalism or between regions.
 - Participants explored how National Voice members could be selected, acknowledging grass roots representation was important but also some advantages of known democratically elected model, noting the need to make it fair and not dominated by some families. Other challenges with elected model included possible disparities in the resources available to different candidates, and the risk of low turnout.
 - There was also a view that existing structures or organisations such as LALCs or AMSs should not be used as basis for selecting voice members, and that whole community needs to be involved.
 - Some suggestions were put forward on possible alternative, culturally appropriate ways of choosing members (for example, a matriarch from each family selecting who should represent them, or matriarch/patriarch tables electing people).
 - Participants strongly supported gender balance. Participants were concerned that only two National Voice members would be from NSW given that it has the largest population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Participants thought that, if NSW is to have two members on the National Voice, one should come from regional NSW.
 - Participants considered the Indigenous Voice proposal in the context of the Treaty processes. They discussed how the National Voice could amplify the voice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to decide what comes next, and does not close off any pathway. They noted that treaty negotiations can take a very long time, and that communities face challenges that need to be addressed now.
 - Participants felt it was important to involve young people. They reflected on Clontarf as an example of a successful program for supporting Aboriginal boys. However, they felt that Aboriginal girls were not being supported in the same way.
 - There was a view that an Ethics Council is needed.
 - Participants felt that there needed to be proxies on the National Voice so that someone could step in if a member was unable to attend meetings.
-