

Indigenous Voice Community Consultation

Consultation session details

Katherine, 28 April 2021, 1.30pm, Session 1

Number of participants: 24

Key points raised

Please note, this is a summary of the discussion and the views and opinions expressed by participants in consultation 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 24 participants. This included attendees who travelled from the surrounding remote communities of Bulman, Barunga and Beswick. Key points discussed are summarised below.

Overarching points

- Many participants articulated why a voice was important to them. Participants expressed frustration at a sense that they could not effectively raise issues under existing arrangements. Participants felt that decision makers needed to listen to people on the ground and feed solutions back to communities “in our language about what it means to us”. Participants also reflected on past government policies. One participant felt that “we’re getting old and everything is still the same”. Another participant expressed frustration that “government policy keeps changing”, including referencing the abolition of ATSIC.
- Participants discussed how information would flow through the local, regional and national levels. This included an emphasis on collecting input from communities, including remote communities, and presenting it at the national level. One participant outlined the importance of the information remaining the same through this process.
- Participants put forward a range of concerns about issues in the community. Incarceration, substance abuse, employment, mental health and school attendance were all raised. Housing was a major concern, particularly for participants from remote communities. This included housing quality, maintenance and overcrowding.

Local & Regional Voice

- The voice of remote communities was a major theme. Some participants felt that remote communities had the greatest need. A key concern was a sense that services should be embedded within remote communities, rather than requiring travel to and from regional centres. Examples given included lack of police presence and the difficulty of travelling to access services like Centrelink and dialysis. Some participants felt that no one came to talk to remote communities, with community members required to travel to participate in conversations. One participant felt that “if you expect them to come to you, then you’re not really inviting them to join the conversation”.
- Participants also discussed possible solutions. One participant felt that the community should choose someone who could collect the information and feed it back to the community. There was also a discussion about setting up local & regional structures so that they do not “drain into one spot” such as a regional centre, but instead have a profile in a range of different communities.

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- More broadly, participants put a strong emphasis on having someone from the community represent the community. One participant expressed this as “if they can’t understand the community, they can’t help”.
 - Participants discussed what a regional boundary might look like for them. Some participants felt that a region could centre on Katherine, and might include surrounding remote communities such as Barunga, Weemol, Bulman and Beswick. Another participant emphasised the importance of regions based on cultural groupings, saying that they did not want a “foundation that is western”.
 - Participants discussed existing structures. Examples raised included Local Decision Making set up by the NT government, and advisory groups of Elders and community members set up by NGOs. There were a range of perspectives on these arrangements. Some participants felt that they were effective at bringing people from different communities into decision making, not just centres like Katherine. Other participants felt that there was a risk of duplication with voice proposals. Co-design members outlined that the proposed voice structures would play a different, complementary role to existing organisations, and could tap into existing structures.
 - Some participants felt there was significant division in Katherine between different organisations and groups, and that the community needed to come together. Two causes were identified: unresolved native title claims, and competitive funding processes. One participant felt that competition between organisations reflected the way that community need for resources exceeded available funding, leading to competition for grants.

National Voice

- Participants expressed concern about having only 2 members of the National Voice from the Northern Territory. Participants supported this by noting the vast size of the NT, its diversity, and its higher percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents.
- Some participants expressed concern about whether the voice would be heard or acted upon. Co-design members outlined the transparency mechanisms in the proposal, which would require the government to explain whether they asked the National Voice for advice, and what the advice was.