

Indigenous Voice Community Consultation

Consultation session details

Arrernte country,

Alice Springs, 6 May 2021, 5.30pm – 8.00pm, session 1

Number of participants: 17

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 17 participants. Key points discussed are summarised below.

Overarching points

- One participant raised the issue of translating documents into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages as critical to set up the Indigenous Voice to speak effectively to, and be informed by, Indigenous Australians. It was noted that there are thousands of English words that have no exact matches in language, and to avoid ambiguity it is important to have documents translated to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who do not primarily transact in English can easily understand what is being discussed.

Local & Regional Voice

- One participant commented that the proposed structure is similar to that of the former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and queried whether anyone regardless of their language group would be accepted into a Local & Regional Voice covering Alice Springs. It was confirmed that it would be up to communities to decide how different people in the community would be represented, but that one of the key principles to underpin Local & Regional Voices is 'inclusive participation'.
 - Another participant observed that it was important people who are disenfranchised through not having grown up on country are also given the opportunity to have a say through the Local & Regional Voice structure.
- Another participant noted that Alice Springs, being a major hub, is surrounded by many satellite towns. It was noted that this would need to be taken into account in regional centres such as Alice Springs, when considering how to structure Local & Regional Voices and define boundaries.
- It was emphasised that governments would be at the table working with Local & Regional Voices, and would be required to work in alignment with the principles-based framework also.
- It was observed that Local & Regional Voices could be the mechanism to allow deep reach into communities, particularly in regional and remote areas, to facilitate the expression of grassroots views on legislation, policy and programs up through to state and federal governments and parliaments.
- One participant commented that 'regional' and 'local' are not clearly defined in the Interim Report. It was noted that this was a conscious design decision, so as to not restrict communities from working this out for themselves.



- Potential ways to define Local & Regional Voice boundaries were discussed, including boundaries determined along cultural lines and by geography. It was noted that the way the boundaries could be worked out could be quite different across the country.
- One participant raised the issue of cross-border regions, in particular the SA/WA/NT tristate border region, as one which needs to be taken into account and respected as a longstanding established area with cross-jurisdictional management. The participant suggested a coordination mechanism may be needed to enable the tristate border region to operate a Local & Regional Voice across the three jurisdictions.

National Voice

- Participants commented that the proposed direct election model to select members for the National Voice could be too costly and increased the risk of potential members having weak ties to communities. It was noted the direct election model may work elsewhere in the country.
- One participant queried how the voices of people in regions could be appropriately represented at the national level, and how National Voice members could be held to account for their advice on behalf of grassroots people. The proposed two-way flow of information feature was discussed; it was noted the National Voice would be setting its national priorities, but that it would be seeking feedback from the grassroots via Local & Regional Voices, and providing feedback back to communities through Local & Regional Voices on how the grassroots views on national issues have informed its advice to Parliament and Government.
- It was noted this would require considerable administrative support and resourcing to achieve in practice. One participant suggested that to make the two-way flow more efficient, there should be two (2) National Voice members of different genders to represent each Local & Regional Voice.
- One participant commented that there needs to be a mechanism built into the National Voice that would require the Parliament and Government to consult in a timely and meaningful manner to enable the advice of the National Voice to genuinely inform and shape legislation and policymaking. It was noted there are transparency mechanisms being proposed, such as a statement of consultation attached to legislation, to make clear what advice was sought and the substance of the advice provided by the National Voice.
 - Another participant queried how local voices could be raised to the national level outside of formal meetings. It was noted that at a prior public session elsewhere, some young participants suggested the development of a phone application that could be used by the National Voice to conduct polls on issues to address the myriad of challenges many people face that prevent them attending meetings.
- It was noted the proposed Ethics Council for the National Voice is another positive departure from the ATSIC model, and that it could be used to ensure National Voice members remain accountable to people in communities.