

Indigenous Voice Community Consultation

Consultation session details

Larrakia country,

Darwin, 27 April, 9am, session 1

Number of participants: 46


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 46 participants who were welcomed to Larrakia country by Richard Fejo. Key points discussed are summarised below.

Overarching points

- Several participants reflected on the history of bodies such as ATSIC being abolished by Government, despite, in their view, working well. This led to discussion about the critical importance of ensuring longevity of the Voice, with 99 years given as a possible timeframe, so conversations such as these consultations would not need to be occurring again.
- In this context, participants discussed possible enshrinement of the Voice in the Constitution, with a wide range of views expressed. Some participants wanted to “think big”, including considering possible changes to the Constitution. They expressed the view that constitutional enshrinement of an Indigenous Voice might protect it from being abolished.
- Varying views were expressed about whether a referendum would be likely to succeed, with some participants characterising it as a “gamble”, while others felt public opinion and particularly young Australians were now supportive. One participant suggested that it should be up to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to decide how an Indigenous Voice happens, not the broader population through a referendum.
 - Co-design members noted that constitutional enshrinement may not be a perfect guarantee, because Government would still be able to decide the details of a voice.
- Participants reflected on some of the history and ongoing challenges faced by Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory, with racism and poverty identified as major issues. There was also a discussion of the child protection system, with one participant emphasising the importance of “communicating to children in the system that they matter”.
- Some participants felt that past policies had caused harm to Aboriginal communities. In particular, the Northern Territory Intervention and the replacement of community councils with regional councils were identified as policies that they felt had caused harm.

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- Funding arrangements for the Northern Territory were a major theme. Participants felt that ensuring proper allocation of resources was critical to addressing challenges faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with one participant suggesting giving the Voice more power to influence allocation of funding to achieve this. One participant felt that money which was allocated to the Northern Territory Government for remote Aboriginal communities was spent in Darwin. Another participant contrasted what they felt was a very high level of scrutiny of Aboriginal organisations with a failure to scrutinise the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Governments and how they were spending money.
 - There was a discussion of Aboriginal identity. One participant looked at this issue from a Stolen Generations point of view. They felt that Stolen Generations people weren't represented by existing organisations and that this should be addressed. Another participant was concerned about people dishonestly claiming Aboriginal identity, and felt that existing structures did not have adequate screening to prevent this.
 - One participant emphasised the need for an education campaign so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people would have greater awareness of the Indigenous Voice.
 - Several participants expressed concern about the level of resourcing that would be available at the different levels of the Indigenous voice. Co-design members outlined that the proposals include secretariat support for both the national and the local and regional levels

Local and Regional Voices

- Participants discussed the flow of information between regional and national levels of the voice. There was support for local and regional issues to be dealt with at the local and regional levels, and a suggestion that data and stories should flow up and inform the advice given at the national level on systemic national issues. Another participant emphasised the importance of people giving input on the ground having a sense that their input was going somewhere. The participant felt this was an important part of getting the community engaged, rather than feeling fatigued or over-consulted.
- Several participants strongly supported a gender balanced approach. Participants saw this as connected to cultural concepts of men's business and women's business.
- One participant queried the involvement of state and territory First Ministers. Co-design members outlined the work of the Senior Officials Group, which includes officials from all state and territory governments and the Local Government Association, and which has been engaged in ongoing discussions about the Local and Regional Voice proposals.
- There was support for the principles, but it was also felt there was a need to ensure governments would uphold them, noting this required major cultural change and leadership within government and the bureaucracy, including changing systems and processes.
- One participant expressed the view that Land Councils need to be involved in the Voice arrangements. The participant felt that some people supported the Land Councils and others did not, but that they provided a good forum for people to speak and debate.
- One participant expressed support for involving young people in the Voice from a very young age, and felt that this could help to address intergenerational trauma and suicide prevention.

National Voice

- There was a discussion about Aboriginal members of Parliament, including that existing Aboriginal members of Parliament primarily represent their constituents, not Aboriginal people as a whole, which supported the need for the National Voice. One participant felt that Aboriginal representation in both houses of Parliament would be called for as part of a treaty agenda.
- There was support for accountability and transparency mechanisms to be built into the Voice arrangements, including for holding all government agencies to account.