

Indigenous Voice Community Consultation

Consultation session details

Kunibidji country,

Maningrida, 4 May, 1pm, session 2

Number of participants: 31

Key points raised

Please note, this is a summary of the discussion and the views 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 31 participants and were welcomed to country by Mr David Jones. The session included separate breakout sessions for men and women. Some comments were made via an interpreter. Key points discussed are summarised below.

Overarching points

- There was broad support for the Voice proposals – One participant commented: ‘We’re singing out for help and arguing for change. If a Voice was set up it would be very good for us. We all want the best for our people. We want to make sure that our voice travels far. We don’t like to beat around the bush. At the moment, we don’t know where our voice goes. Even if this takes time, we want to see it happen’.
- Some participants felt disempowered by the current approaches to policy making and engagement. They wanted to see change and empowerment for the community.
 - There was frustration at the silos within government and the experience of being ‘passed from one department to another without resolution’, particularly on the issue of housing.
 - Participants felt the proposal offered a ‘one stop shop’ for governments to engage with communities, identify priorities and make decisions.
- Participants wanted assurances that these proposals will ‘get off the ground’ and a few expressed scepticism about Government’s ability to deliver.
- It was acknowledged that setting up and implementing the Voice would take time to get right. Participants felt it shouldn’t be written off too quickly and will need time to evolve.
- They discussed the importance of including youth voices – ‘We get some kids that want to speak up, but kids need support...giving kids an opportunity to talk is really important.’
- It was suggested that a leadership pathway for young people should be included in the Voice design.

Local and Regional Voice

- Participants supported the flexible principles based approach to Local and Regional Voices.
- They wanted to see a local voice that was strong and truthful.
- One participant shared an example of an existing local structure they felt was working well:

- The Njamareya Cultural Leaders and Justice Group (Njamareya). Established in 2018, it meets regularly to discuss local issues.
- There was broad agreement that any Local and Regional Voice will be stronger if people can come together as one voice across communities – ‘If we can work together we will be much stronger. It’s hard to break many sticks, compared to one’.
- Participants were supportive of shared decision making and noted that too many decisions are made for community instead of by community.
- There was discussion about whether Maningrida would be grouped in a Central, West or East Arnhem Land region. It was noted that some communities have strong existing cultural and language ties and that there are 30-37 language groups in the area.
- Participants emphasised the importance of culture in Arnhem Land and discussed the principle of cultural leadership.
- There was support for the inclusive participation principle, particularly the inclusion of members of the stolen generation and their descendants and people living in isolated homelands.
- There was agreement that Local and Regional Voices should be adequately resourced and supported.
- Participants felt that regional voices should capture when there was broad agreement among members on particular topics, as well as when there were differing views. This would be an important part of their transparency and accountability.
- There was support for linkages between the Local and Regional Voice and the National Voice and some discussion about whether individual members might sit on both groups.
- Participants felt it was important to see all levels of government engage with the Local and Regional Voice.
- There was significant discussion about priority issues in Maningrida, including:
 - Housing – e.g. maintenance, overcrowding, health, safety and homelessness.
 - Infrastructure maintenance
 - Bilingual curriculum to support language and culture
 - Funding for the youth centre – e.g. for more space and more staff
 - Youth unemployment
 - Smoking
 - Remand accommodation and programs to keep prisoners connected to culture
 - Advocating for changes to the Community Development Program (CDP) – e.g. participants felt it did not work in the bush, was punitive and did not help upskill recipients. It was noted that there are different rules for people living in Darwin (who are not subject to CDP).
 - Improving the Centrelink processes – e.g. reducing long wait times for a payment and getting cut off.
- There was support for linkages between the Local and Regional Voice and the National Voice, particularly to influence national policies relevant to these priority issues.

National Voice

- Participants discussed how the National Voice would interact with Parliament.
 - The co-design member clarified that the proposal suggests a new joint committee of Parliament would be established to focus on Indigenous issues, similar to the current Human Rights Committee.
- There was some discussion about how members to the National Voice would be selected, and a few participants expressed a preference for an elected model.
- Participants also felt that members should have strong cultural ties.
- There was support for remote representation on the National Voice group.
- Participants agreed that it was important for the Voice to influence mainstream policies.