

# Indigenous Voice Community Consultation

## Consultation session details

Yolngu country,

Nhulunbuy, 7 May, 10am, 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 and were welcomed to country by Mr Witiyana Marika. The session included separate breakout sessions for men and women. Key points discussed are summarised below.

### Overarching points

- Participants felt the proposals offered a chance to ‘reset the relationship’ between communities and governments.
- It was noted that it was time for action and that governments need to listen to community to achieve tangible outcomes.
- Two participants expressed strong support for constitutional enshrinement to ensure the Voice was secure and protected.
- Some participants suggested the Voice could be a ‘one stop shop’ for people to come together and engage with community in a streamlined way.
  - One participant felt the current approach to government engagement resulted in a ‘kaleidoscope effect’ - whereby any movement (in the eye of Government) changed the shapes and pictures they see. ‘Things look different quickly when engagement is haphazard and piecemeal’.
- There was agreement that government will have to change and build their own capacity and cultural competency to engage with the Voice models appropriately.
- Participants discussed alternative ways to engage youth and capture their views, including using social media and apps.
- There was some discussion about the former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC):
  - There was a regional council under ATSIC and at the local level, there were community councils. People felt it worked well.
  - People felt they had a voice and authority in the ATSIC days under the regional council structure.
  - One participant felt the distribution of funding had been fairer under ATSIC than it was now.
  - It was acknowledge that ATSIC ended before a lot of young people were born, so there is no reference point for young people.

- Co-design members clarified that the proposed Voice models won't administer funding (as ATSIC had), however, at the Local and Regional level, the proposal includes shared decision making. This may include priority setting and consideration of how funding is targeted at these priorities.
- One participant was disappointed that more community members were not in attendance to hear the proposals – 'When we finish here, we need to go and tell the people. This is a big step forward'.

#### *Local & Regional Voice*

- Participants agreed that regional voices should be at the heart of the Voice proposal and that more policies should be coming up from the regional level, rather than coming down from Canberra.
- There was discussion about what a region could look like in East Arnhem Land. Participants suggested it needs to be based on clan structures but should not be owned by one clan group.
  - There was a perception that the two dominant clan groups are often the only ones consulted.
  - The outlying clans miss out and there isn't an even distribution of resources.
- Participants agreed that the resourcing level for a Voice needs to be appropriate, particularly to support inclusive participation and ensure remote homelands are included – 'You'll have better outcomes in communities if you have everyone included'.
- Participants supported the data and evidence principle. Access to statistics would help advocate for change and inform decision making.
- The importance of resourcing was raised – One participant commented that there have been previous efforts to establish local governance structures similar to the old village council. However, a lack of resources meant it never got off the ground.
- The role of the State and Territory Governments was discussed. Participants supported their involvement and wanted to see Aboriginal people contributing to and leading policies across all levels of government.
- It was suggested that a separate group for young people would be needed in the regional structure e.g. the similar to the Young Leaders Aboriginal Corporation. They felt this would help build future leaders and help strengthen other leadership structures.
- Participants expressed great concern about several local issues, including:
  - Poverty
  - Gambling (e.g. bush casinos) and substance abuse.
  - Homelands
  - The Community Development Program (CDP) - one participation (supported by those attending) described the failure of the CDP scheme to provide meaningful work and described how participants were trapped in poverty.
- Key priorities for a future Local and Regional Voice to address included:
  - A Women's resource centre and safe house form women and children who are victims of family violence; great concern about the increasing levels of violence were expressed and the urgent need for support was emphasised.
  - Programs to support social and emotional wellbeing.
  - Jobs and opportunities for community beyond the Rio Tinto Grove Mine shutdown (expected in 2030).
  - Healthcare and medical staff – e.g. one participant noted the ratio of doctors to people in Nhulunbuy (1:2000) compared to Sydney (1:500) and the advanced nature of serious health issues in remote communities.

#### *National Voice*

- Co-design members clarified that the National voice will be advisory only and will not administer funding.
- One participant expressed concern that it will only be advisory. They felt it would lack real authority and that there is a risk government/parliament will pick and choose what they listen to.
  - There was some discussion about cultural complexity and who in government would be a 'cultural translator' to ensure concepts and advice are well understood.



- There was some concern that the National Voice would have to reconcile different views from each of the Local and Regional Voices on significant policy topics. Remote voices may be lost to 'louder urban voices'. Participants also noted the challenge of ensuring Commonwealth Government policies are sensitive to place and complexity, rather than a 'one size fits all' approach.
- Participants supported an ethics council to ensure members are the 'right and proper' people to do this work and to ensure that members can be removed if required.
- It was acknowledged it could take 'a few years of teething processes' for the Voice to work.