

Indigenous Voice Community Consultation

Consultation session details

Yolngu country,

Ramingining, 7 May, 9am, session 1

Number of participants: 54

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 54 participants and were welcomed to country by Mr Ronnie Garrawarra. Many participants spoke in Yolgnu Matha (Djambarrpuynngu). Their comments were interpreted by Ms Rose Laybalayba. Key points discussed are summarised below.

Overarching points

- Participants agreed that it's important to hear the voice of the people 'on the ground'.
- There was strong support for truth telling.
- Some participants spoke about the strength of Yolgnu knowledge and the importance of songlines as a cultural map.
- Many participants spoke from the heart and shared personal anecdotes:
 - One participant was inspired by, and drew on, the lyrics of John Farnham's song 'You're the Voice': 'Words inspire me, song inspires me. You have given me a voice in this moment. This is our chance, before we get much older. We're not going to sit in silence, we're not going to live with fear...we all stand together with the power to be powerful...believing we can make it better'.
 - The participant also said 'I've been crying in my dreams, this moment for me is the making of a new era. It's the muscle taken out of our mouth to be heard'.
- One participant expressed hope that this was not an 'empty voice' and that governments would have to start listening.
- Another participant commented that 'this is the change we want, we are being given a chance' and that as leaders, it's 'time to take action for our children'.
- Many participants spoke about the importance of bringing people together for the Voice to succeed:
 - One participant expressed hope that people could look 'beyond the specific individuals who might be involved and come together, trust each other and work in unity'.
 - One participant spoke of local efforts to bring groups together to talk and share ideas.
 - Another participant spoke about bringing governments and community together – 'It's important the two parties are equal and learn each other's culture'.
- A few participants spoke of the challenge of closing the gap and felt they had tried a lot of different things to improve outcomes. They felt many programs were not working and that outcomes were still poor.

There was a general feeling of stress and worry in the community – ‘We’re struggling and we’re disempowered’.

- Some of the key issues and priorities discussed by participants included:
 - Prejudice and racism in the NT health system.
 - Lack of access to health care services for remote peoples.
 - NT housing - including maintenance, overcrowding, waitlist times and the management of leases.
 - Funding for Rangers Programs to look after country and develop economic opportunities such as a crocodile farm.
 - Getting Traditional Owners back on country.
 - Youth programs with a particular focus on ceremony and cultural activities.
 - Programs to prevent petrol sniffing and marijuana use among youth.
 - Young people in the justice system and options for community-based alternatives to jail. There was strong support for camps that used cultural learning and practices to put young people on the right path, away from the dangers of substance abuse and incarceration.
 - Remand reform – e.g. participants spoke about the long wait time spent in prison awaiting court hearings and sentencing. They noted it is like going to prison for nothing, as not all are then convicted. It has a damaging effect on people’s mental and physical health.
 - A new approach to replace the Community Development Program (CDP) and Centrelink – e.g. alternatives to the punitive approach, penalties and getting welfare cut off.
 - Indigenous Businesses – e.g. participants wanted to see more community led organisations and businesses. They felt this would give greater ownership and improve services/outcomes.

Local & Regional Voice

- Participants wanted to see the Local and Regional Voice build long term respectful partnerships with all levels of government.
- A few participants spoke about how a partnership table could work and how funding would be accessed.
- There was support for the Local and Regional Voice to speak directly to Commonwealth and State Government.
- Participants strongly supported the ‘community-led design’ principle and shared decision making – ‘We want government to make decisions with us, not against us...too often we are dealing with the middle-man who receives funding to deliver programs but we are capable of handling our territory. They need to give us a chance’.
- A few participants discussed existing organisations:
 - Binipilingmirring Djakakining Mala (BDM) - an Elders Group made up of local clan leaders, established as the cultural law and order authority for Ramingining. Their goal is to create a forum to discuss and address local issues effectively.
 - Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation (ALPA) - established in 1972 as a cooperative of community stores, they have expanded their businesses and projects in the region.
 - East Arnhem Shire Council - local authority groups have been created for each community in East Arnhem Land. There are 6-14 appointed members in Ramingining.
 - Arafura Swamp Rangers Aboriginal Corporation – they are striving to be leaders for young people in the community.
- Some participants felt these organisations could play a role in the regional voice:
 - One participant felt the Voice should be made up of representatives from every local organisation.
 - Another felt the Council was already providing a voice for people in the region and engaging with community.
- Other participants felt these organisations could offer useful learnings and support the development of a Regional Voice structure.