

Indigenous Voice Community Consultation

Consultation session details

Yawuru Country

Broome, 3 May 2021, 11.30am

Number of participants: 31


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.

Natalie Dean conducted a smoking ceremony to welcome participants to Yawuru Country. 31 participants attended. Key points discussed are summarised below.

Overarching points

- Participants expressed their frustration with past actions of government and felt that past recommendations had not been acted upon on issues such as deaths in custody. There was also concern about abolition of past Indigenous bodies.
- Reflecting this frustration, participants expressed a range of concerns about what this might mean for the proposed Indigenous Voice. One participant stated that they supported the details of the proposal, but were worried about whether there would be support from Government. Participants raised the possibility that the voice could be abolished, for example after a future change of Government. There were also concerns that the advice of the voice would not be listened to. One participant emphasised the importance of goodwill from both state and Commonwealth governments.
- The Uluru Statement was discussed by participants. One participant was concerned about the terms of reference for the co-design groups excluding constitutional recognition. Participants emphasised the importance of “structural reform” for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Other participants raised treaty as an issue.
- The session included participation from high school students. The students raised a range of issues about how they saw an Indigenous voice. Issues raised by the students included a concern that they were being unfairly compared to non-Indigenous students, and that they weren’t being given a fair say.
- Funding was a major theme. Participants were concerned that funding provided to the WA Government for Aboriginal people was not being spent appropriately. They contrasted this with the stringent conditions on funding for Aboriginal organisations. Another participant argued for “going beyond buckets of money” and creating an economic base. They put forward the idea of setting aside money for a future fund and giving voice structures control of the funding.



Local & Regional Voice

- Participants discussed how the voice of the Kimberley could be heard. There was a clear sense that the Kimberley is a fairly well organised region with a range of existing structures and longstanding discussions about bringing together a voice for the whole region. Some participants reflected on the challenge of gathering input from all sources in order to articulate the needs of the Kimberley as a whole. Some participants felt that the priorities of the Kimberley were “way down the list” of priorities for government.
- Participants raised the range of existing organisations. Traditional ownership was raised as an important consideration, with participants identifying five regional blocs across the Kimberley. Native title is determined across most of the Kimberley, and participants noted the important role of PBCs as a structure that the community can go to. Organisations with expertise, for example in health or education were also raised.
- There were a range of views on these existing structures. One participant saw this wide range as creating a “fractured” voice to government in the region. Another participant emphasised the importance of acknowledging the hard work already done, and ensuring that the voice does not “wipe it away”. Another participant felt that a local & regional voice would need a clear “value proposition” to bring all these existing organisations to the table. A number of participants emphasised the need to respect and acknowledge these different voices, including the role of traditional owners to exercise their authority as custodians of country.
- One participant raised concerns about the range of different but similar processes such as Empowered Communities, Closing the Gap and the WA Aboriginal Advisory Council. The participant felt that these processes used similar language about partnership and empowerment, creating a risk of confusion, duplication and inefficiency. They also felt that there was a lack of clarity about what the voice proposals meant for these other arrangements.
- One participant emphasised that the voice shouldn’t have to represent everyone. They felt that some people may not want to participate, for example if they would prefer to rely on structures they already have.
- Some participants raised the idea of using language groups as a basis for regional structures. They suggested that, by having more regions in the Kimberley, this could lead to a stronger Kimberley voice.

National Voice

- Several participants expressed concern about WA having only two members. Some participants emphasised the importance of hearing the Kimberley voice, not just the voice of large cities.
- One participant raised the challenge of National Voice members having knowledge of a broad range of policies. They noted the importance of connecting with cultural authorities and subject matter experts on key issues, and the need for a strong support structure for the National Voice.