

Indigenous Voice Community Consultation

Consultation session details

Gimuy Walubarra Yidinji and Yirrganydji Gurabana,

Cairns, 13 April 2021, 9.00am, session 1

Number of participants: 7

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 7 participants who were welcomed to country by Aunty Henrietta Marie. Key points discussed are summarised below.

Overarching points

- Participants agree there needs to be a positive outcome from this co-design process, there needs to be a voice.
- A participant said there is a need to define for communities how this co-design process will support them and what the expected outcomes will be - to encourage community to participate.
- One participant said the key to a Voice will be good leadership, and effective and efficient communication. If there are these factors, then people in community will support, unless the outcome doesn't appear to be what they asked for.
- One participant queried the use of the term 'agreement making' with regard to the presentation slide showing the Uluru Statement, stating that the Uluru Statement used the term 'treaty'. Another participant discussed treaty, and what constitutes a treaty with Indigenous people, stating that it has to encompass social issues, not just land. It has to be comprehensive.
- A participant raised the matter of legislation for a Voice, asking if there will be a new piece of legislation, what kind it will be and if it will have the ability to ensure the government responds?
 - Co-design members shared their views that they hope it will be a new piece of legislation to establish a Voice.
- One participant discussed Closing the Gap, wondering if it was meant to achieve the same things as the Indigenous Voice proposals of providing opportunities for Indigenous people to be involved in the decisions of government. However, the participant reflected that the Closing the Gap but this seems to have not been followed-through. Further, when the government comes to talk to community, they often use bureaucratic jargon that is hard to understand.
 - Co-design members responded that the co-design groups commissioned a literature review on previous and existing arrangements, and looked at the kind of mistakes and challenges from previous bodies and arrangements, to ensure the Indigenous Voice proposals address these matters.
- The importance of youth as part of the framework was mentioned.



Local & Regional Voice

- Participants agreed there need to be a voice at the local level for when decisions are being made about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- One participant talked about the Cairns local council Indigenous reference group and how it isn't used or valued as much as it should be. "Would this proposal give it some teeth?"
 - Co-design members clarified the importance that all levels of government are part of a voice.
- A participant asked about the definition of local, and of regional, and where they meet.
 - The co-design members responded that the name of Local and Regional is about scale – in the deserts, those regions will be geographically large, but have a small population. But in Sydney, the boundaries will be a lot smaller, but have a higher population. It will be up to communities to work with governments to define the regions and boundaries.
- One participant discussed the many different boundaries being used, which will need to be part of the design of Local and Regional Voice boundaries. This includes old ATSIC regions, local governments, state government education regions, state government health sector regions, Aboriginal Medical Services regions, and most importantly tribal boundaries.
- Another participant raised the issue of cross-border service issue. They illustrated their point with their example of the Commonwealth Government providing services in the Torres Strait to citizens of PNG, yet it is difficult to get a state to service people from another state.
- One participant said that communication is a big issue. If there were smaller local areas and regions, this would assist with sharing of information. A lot of Indigenous peoples in remote areas are not IT literate, there is a need for more face to face engagement. The participant said the Local and Regional Principles should include a principle on communication.
- A participant asked if the Local and Regional Voices would be people appointed from current organisations. If they were, how would they be endorsed by the rest of the community, and how would the rest of the community have a say? Another participant said they hear the same voices over and over again. The quiet voices are just as important, to make it fair. We need to ensure those voices are heard because there needs to be local endorsement of the voice.
 - Co-design members clarified that it will be up to the community to decide. There are a number of ways to choose people including community meetings, online polling, community engagements etc. There are advantages and disadvantages for the different ways of selecting people. For example, there could be low voter turnout for elections. Members noted that communities will have to choose a range of strategies.
- One participant gave an example of the service organisation they work in which ensures the voice of clients is reflected in the services being delivered. This could be a model for a Voice, hearing the voice of the people and feeding it up to the programs being delivered.

National Voice

- One participant said there needs to be a mechanism to ensure the government listens if a Voice provides advice. This mechanism also needs to ensure the government has considered the advice and show how the government has used the advice.
- One participant asked if there will be a review mechanism after a Voice is established? Could there also be a clause so the government cannot abolish the Voice? There could be an inbuilt assessment process, so a Voice undertakes this review itself and responds to accountability.
 - Co-design members responded that a review mechanism is part of the proposal, and that could be continuous improvement, an ongoing review process.
- One participant asked if the advice from a Voice would also be to the public service? "When it comes to implementation, the public service develops their own strategies in isolation and it has failed us many times."
 - The co-design members clarified that the advice would be to the public service as well, also to statutory authorities and other agencies of government. There is also a principle of engaging with the National Voice early on and continuing all the way through the implementation.
- Another participant asked if there will be a relationship between the National Voice and other national bodies?



- The co-design members clarified there is a principle of non-duplication. The National Voice would engage with other national peak bodies to ensure the advice from the National Voice is well informed and to amplify other voices.
- There was a discussion on representatives from the Torres Strait Islands, and how the proposals state those representatives could speak on behalf of Torres Strait Islanders living on the mainland for issues of national significance. One participant suggested instead that 1 TSI representative be based on the islands, and the other based on the mainland.
- Some participants agreed that it will be hard for the small number of National Voice members to represent all peoples.
- One participant asked if the Disability Advisory Group proposal is intended to represent all domains of disability. The co-design members said that is the intention.
- Two participants said there should be capacity building of Voice members, and governance training.
 - Co-design members agreed, and said the proposal includes the option of an 'ethics council' to review all candidates and members to ensure integrity.