

Indigenous Voice Community Consultation

Consultation session details

Gimuy Walubarra Yidinji and Yirrganydji Gurabana,

Cairns, 14 April 2021, 6.00pm, session 3

Number of participants: 36


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

Overarching points

- A table of participants asked why the consultations are not being held in community centres? Families can't always afford transport costs and this is another example of government failing to engage with community appropriately.
- A table of participants said that the system needs to change to engage with the grassroots people. Their voices are not being heard, particularly by politicians. The participants said they don't want to see another ATSIC.
 - Co-design members agreed and they are not proposing or recreating another ATSIC.
- A few participants said that the Uluru Statement was about a Voice to Parliament that is constitutionally enshrined. Indigenous people are not even mentioned in the Constitution. This co-design process is about a legislated Voice to Government and they are not happy with this process. If the Voice is only legislated, then the Government can abolish it, just like ATSIC. "When it gets too tough, the Government can close it down without our say."
 - Co-design members clarified that they in fact designed proposals that are a Voice to both the Parliament and the Government. The Government has said they won't hold a referendum at this point. There is a big risk of holding a referendum right now because it could be lost. Australians will not vote for a Voice is they don't know what it looks like. The Co-design members are doing the job of designing the proposals. Whether a referendum is held or not, the Voice needs to be designed regardless.
 - A participant agreed that if the referendum is held and is lost, then it wouldn't be seen for a long time. They are worried about their children growing up and the situation is still the same as it is now. "Will they still be fighting for their rights in this country?"
 - Another participant said they don't want to be back here in the future designing the next proposal for representation.
- One participant said the Voice needs to be heard on matters such as suicide, health, and other social issues.

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- One participant asked how the treaty negotiations stand with the Voice co-design process?
 - Co-design members clarified that the Voice co-design process is complementary to state treaty processes, and do not stand in the way.
 - A table of participants spoke of being born and raised in Cairns, it is not their country, but is their home. For young people, they don't have a say in where they grow up, but it is their responsibility to carry on the traditional knowledge. In the proposals, the National Voice only has a sub-committee, and the Local and Regional Voice does not mention young people. The National Voice needs reserved seats for young people, and the Local and Regional Voice 'inclusive participation' principle needs to specifically reference young people, or there needs to be a separate principle. This is because young peoples' experience is complex and their voices need to be heard at every level of government – "the solutions need to include young people".
 - The co-design members responded that the Youth Advisory Group is not designed as the only mechanism to get involved, it is additional. However, the proposals can expand the recommendations to ensure young people are considered in the formation of the Local and Regional Voice and the National Voice.

Local & Regional Voice

- A table of participants asked how big the region would be for Cairns, and if it would include the Cape and Torres Strait?
 - Co-design members responded that it will ultimately be up to local people. However, the Torres Strait Islands would be a region on its own due to distinct culture.
 - The Local and Regional Co-design Group looked at boundaries as part of the co-design work. This includes boundaries for old ATSIC regions, local governments, state government education regions, state government health sector regions, Aboriginal Medical Services regions, and most importantly tribal boundaries. The Local and Regional Co-design Group has proposed between 25-35 regions - 35 was the number of regions under ATSIC. People need to talk about this, and it may be a difficult issue in some parts of the country.
- On the number of regions, one participant said 35 is not enough and amounts to marginalisation. This number will mean communities will have to be part of a larger region. "We had to fight for very few rights, we don't want to be marginalised again."
- A table of participants asked how will the Local and Regional Voice be designed and chosen?
 - Co-design members responded that it is up to the people of the region to determine themselves. The Local and Regional Voice proposal is very flexible and based on principles, the first being Empowerment.
- One participant said they would not like to see historical residents speaking on behalf of traditional owners. The voice should be a traditional voice.
 - The co-design members clarified there are different types of leadership styles, and this is why it is up to the local people to lead the design and development of their Local and Regional Voice. As part of the co-design meetings, the Co-design Groups balanced the need to ensure the voices who are rarely heard are part of the design with the need for cultural leadership. This is part of the principles framework for Local and Regional Voices. All the principles need to be observed in the way Local and Regional Voices are established, but not every region will look the same as there is great flexibility.
- One participant asked if this proposal is the "long road to sovereignty for us? Are we talking about self-government?"
 - Co-design members clarified that the co-design groups use the term 'shared decision making', which means government cannot make decisions by themselves or in the absence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, only in partnership. This would be shared decision making with all levels of government, as the vast majority of funding comes from the state and territory governments. This is why the Local and Regional Voice is the most important part of the Voice.
- One participant said there needs to be resourcing to design and develop the Local and Regional Voices, otherwise those with power will dominate the conversation.



National Voice

- One participant said they support the design of the Torres Strait Islands member representing people on the mainland, and supports the option of only 1 member for the ACT as they are a small jurisdiction.
- One participant asked why the membership model proposes 2 members from each state and territory? They would prefer a proportional representation model.
 - The co-design members responded that the proposal for 2 members from each state and territory provides equal representation. There was discussion to distribute membership numbers on population basis to make it really fair, but that will change over time and in some areas it changes quite fast. The membership model needs to be fair over time. The proposal is a compromise between demographic calculations and giving everyone a fair go.
- A participant asked how Stolen Generations people will be represented on the National Voice?
 - Co-design members responded that there are two extra appointed positions for the National Voice that could be used for representation of Stolen Generations people, or the National Voice could establish a committee to provide expert advice on these policy matters.