

# Indigenous Voice Community Consultation

## Consultation session details

Ngunnawal and Ngambri country,

Canberra, 30 March 2021, 2.00pm-5.00pm, Session 2

Number of participants: 13

## 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 13 participants. Key points discussed are summarised below.

### *Overarching points*

- Issues discussed in this consultation session included ensuring grassroots people and communities are empowered through the Indigenous Voice structures (e.g. through townhall-type meetings), self-determination, ensuring the long-term durability of the Indigenous Voice, the flexibility and non-prescriptiveness of the Indigenous Voice proposals so as to enable regions and communities to make decisions on how to structure themselves and operate.
- Several participants sought advice regarding the funding of both the Local & Regional and National voices. It was confirmed that while details have not yet been worked out, it is envisioned that Local & Regional Voices will have a secretariat to support them, and the National Voice will have larger secretariat support.

### *Local & Regional Voice*

- There was discussion around regions, with some participants querying the number of regions, who they would include, and how they would be established. It was confirmed that the proposed 25-35 number refers to the proposed number of regions, and there would be flexibility for how regions structure themselves. Also confirmed that the ACT would likely be one region.
- One participant commented the number of regions sounds very similar to ATSIC. It was confirmed that key lessons from ATSIC were considered in designing the Voice proposals and 25-35 regions was identified as being the ideal number. A difference between ATSIC and the Voice is that the Voice will not handle funding or run programs, but have an advocacy and advisory role.
- One participant asked whether regional boundaries would be informed by tribal boundaries and what this would mean for the ACT. It was confirmed regional boundaries would not be based on tribal boundaries, although local council boundaries had been considered. It was noted regional boundaries would be determined in co-design with states/territories and communities after the Voice proposals are agreed by government.
- A participant noted there would likely be conflicts at the regional level, with communities within a region having different priorities, and sought advice on whether there would be an appeals body. It was confirmed that the interim report acknowledges a need for arbitration options, with the details to be confirmed.

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- One participant commented that an amalgamation of local voices into regional structures was at odds with the principle of empowerment, and proposed that if there are 250 Indigenous nations, this should guide regional boundaries. The participant noted it may be appropriate for communities to amalgamate if they seek to, but advised many are unable to based on cultural laws and business, and there is a risk the biggest family groups will have the biggest voices, which is at odds with the principle of inclusive participation. Confirmed participation in the Voice will be voluntary and there has been much consideration given to how all voices can be heard, including those from small communities in very remote areas, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people not living on country.
  - One participant voiced strong support for the principles and governance model.
  - Another participant expressed strong support for the inclusive participation principle, and the transparency principle for minimum expectations. They affirmed a strong preference for the independent assessment option for recognition, pending detail of the independent body and who is on it.
  - Several participants commented the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body (ATSIEB) structure needs to communicate better on how priorities and agendas are developed and to better seek input from the community. It was also noted that ATSIEB does not have many young people involved, and does not tend to take advice from individuals who were born elsewhere and have moved to the ACT. It was advised existing bodies, such as ATSIEB, may need to be tweaked to align with the principles, or a new body created where existing bodies are not fit-for-purpose.

#### *National Voice*

- One participant commented that the proposed 16-20 National Voice members is restrictive as it is a group that needs to represent a large number of people. It was confirmed larger numbers of members had been considered by the co-design members, but that numbers too large risked causing the National Voice to not be effective, and numbers too small (i.e. one per jurisdiction) risked leading to the National Voice not having gender balance.
- There was discussion about the cultural appropriateness of gender representation, with group consensus that equal gender representation is good.
- Several participants commented that if the National Voice is expected to respond to legislation, there will be time pressure and a risk that the time needed to consult with communities would either slow down parliamentary processes, or mean the National Voice wouldn't be consulted properly. It was noted the National Voice is proposed to be a voice to both the Parliament and the Government, with a National Voice to the Government meaning input would be able to be sought at the early stages of policy development, before legislation gets to the Parliament, which would help with timeframes.
- In relation to how National Voice members could be selected, one participant expressed support for the Option 2 (direct election) model, but identified that there is a chicken/egg issue in that people need to be confident in the system to want to vote in it, and that it would take time for that confidence to build. It was acknowledged this is a challenge that has faced groups like the Victorian First Peoples' Assembly, and there are options such as a hybrid model, which may be appropriate as a starting point. The participant also conceded it may be appropriate for jurisdictions to use the Option 1 (structurally linked to model to be used to initially establish the National Voice, and to switch to the Option 2 model once there was community confidence in the National Voice (and therefore more people willing to participate in a direct election to choose its members)). It was clarified that jurisdictions would determine for themselves which model worked best for them, or if they preferred to use a hybrid arrangement.
- One participant asked how the National Voice would be protected from potentially being abolished by government in the future. Confirmed that there is no guarantee and that parliaments ultimately have sovereignty. The National Voice gives an opportunity to develop effective working relationships with the parliament and the government of the day, as well as the bureaucracy.
- Another participant noted the scope of the obligation on Parliament and Government to consult the National Voice is narrow compared with the scope of Commonwealth responsibility and asked why it is envisioned the National Voice will speak to issues restricted to race and land matters, when it should also have a say in other priority areas, e.g. areas identified by the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. Several participants agreed with this sentiment. It was suggested the scope of the National Voice may change over time.



- Participants generally agreed it was a good idea for National Voice membership to be refreshed on a staggered basis, so knowledge and experience is retained.