

Indigenous Voice Community Consultation

Consultation session details

Gumbaynggirr country,

Coffs Harbour, 17 March 2021, 5.00pm, Session 1

Number of participants: 12

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 12 participants. Key points discussed are summarised below.

- All participants agreed on the need for a Voice. Many participants also stated there is a sense of urgency to do this now or the opportunity could be missed.
 - An Elder said ‘there are hard times ahead and we need to get things in place for our people’. He was happy to hear how people were talking at this session and this proposal is a good start.
- There was opposition to the word “Indigenous”. Participants identified as Aboriginal.
- Another participant spoke on the Voice being a powerful thing for all Australians, as Indigenous Australians can speak on behalf of country, and care for country. Indigenous Australians care for the community, between elders and young people, and can share this with all Australians.
- Participants discussed how this proposal would unite community. This means community as a whole will have a stronger voice. One participant noted community wouldn’t need this structure if community was already united, and it was noted that government decisions can cause division
- In considering Local and Regional Voices, some participants stated that community could start from scratch. Previous bodies have been reviewed and the flaws are known. Past experiences could be learnt from.
- It was clarified that the Voice co-design process is addressing one of the three parts of the Uluru Statement, the call for a Voice.
- Participants asked about the commitment to the Voice, if the Government is committed to the proposal?
 - Participants wanted a guarantee that the work to design and develop the Voice will continue beyond an election.
- Participants reinforced the critical need for housing.
- It was also discussed how governments need to reform as well, to meet community as they unite and establish voices. There will be a massive change on how the government does its business.

Local and Regional Voices

- Participants discussed the need for Local and Regional Voices to speak to all levels of governments. In particular engaging with local governments. The Voice needs a direct line of communication to all levels.

- 
- A discussion on regional boundaries and regions was held.
 - All participants agreed regions should reflect what community think.
 - One participant pointed out there are nine NSWALC regions and posed this could be the same for Local and Regional Voices. This would assist with keeping boundaries between different arrangements similar and assist with accountability and alignment. Community is also used to dealing with these boundaries.
 - There is an established system in NSW with the land rights system. These boundaries are established along cultural lines. However, another participant noted that the land rights system causes division.
 - Regions should be based on First Nations boundaries and cultural regions, including those which cross state boundaries. This would make it harder for state governments and it would be up to community to make it work.
 - A question was asked on the rationale for the number of regions. One participant noted that it appeared decided to use state boundaries and queried why this was being consulted on. The participant acknowledged that state boundaries made it easier for governments.
 - One participant said that states with the most regions will get together to take all the available funding at the expense of smaller states with fewer regions.
 - One participant raised Wreck Bay in the Jervis Bay Territory, which is delivered services by the ACT, but physically separate. They stated that its voice will be lost because they will not have their own representative.
 - A participant liked the idea of a transitional body as this could bring people together for true community led proposals. This could become the innovative body to bring everyone together.
 - One participant agreed that Local and Regional Voices need to speak for everyone as everyone's voice is important.
 - It was noted that not everyone is a member of an organisation but still need a voice.
 - In existing structures, if an individual's voice is not in agreement with the organisation's positions, then their voice is squashed and not heard.
 - Many participants spoke about matters relating to Inclusive Participation.
 - One participant asked how local voices would be designed? They stated that many local people do not get a voice. In local arrangements you see large family groups voting to elect a family member and the rest of the community don't really get a voice.
 - One participant said there needs to be flexibility in Local and Regional Voices in the representation to allow the right person on a topic to talk on a particular topic. The participant also asked if there was a body of work to understand who is the right person to speak on a particular matter. Because if there is, then there is no need to duplicate that. It was clarified that there hasn't been a body of work vetting people, and that under the proposal the community will get a say in how funding is being used.
 - Participants spoke of the need to remind community what this principle looks like in practice, particularly in connection with Cultural Leadership. There are examples of this in practice already.
 - One participant raised who the Voice is meant to represent, the people or the leaders. They stated that leaders often drown out the people on the ground.
 - One participant raised the issue of communities being disengaged and asked how they will they get involved in Local and Regional Voices? The voices need to include outer locations, not just the big cities and towns.
 - One participant raised that the Local and Regional Voice needs to be representative of community that have no interest in land councils and no interest in funding.
 - A discussion was held on existing arrangements and bodies, and not duplicating those, as well as connecting with all levels of government.
 - It was noted there are a lot of state level voice-like bodies and structures. This includes land councils. One participant thought the proposal was seeking to duplicate or replicate what is already in place. It was clarified that there are communities with structure in place which are working well and this proposal is not to replace those or come over the top.



- People are also members of peak bodies and these are meant to be peoples' voices.
- One participants asked if state governments are part of the discussion or if the Voice proposal is completely separate? The importance of all levels of government was reinforced.
- Also alignment with the NSW Premiers priorities
- There was strong support for the principle of Accountability and Transparency.
- The principle of Data and Evidence Based Decision Making was supported and needed. Participants talked of the need for evidence-based tools for projects and programs to develop funding proposals.

National Voice

- One participant stated that the structurally linked model will not work because people will say the members don't speak for them.
- One participant said that Government appointment members don't speak for community.
- The election model attracted some criticism as a lot of Aboriginal people don't want to be on the electoral roll. A separate electoral roll will still cause people to be anxious they will have to be on the ordinary electoral roll. There is also a concern about voter turnout. In NSWALC elections, there is only a small voter turnout which means people only need a couple hundred votes to be elected. However, if an election is used, the voting age should be dropped to 16.
- Another participant stated the National Voice could use the land councils' electoral roll. This would also encourage people to become members of the land councils.
- However, another participant said not everyone feels represented by land councils.