

Indigenous Voice Community Consultation

Consultation session details

Wiradjuri country,

Dubbo, 22 March 2021, 9.30am, 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 who were welcomed to country by Aunty Narelle Boys. Key points discussed are summarised below.

Overarching and general points

- It was agreed by all participants that there is both a need and strong support for an Indigenous Voice.
- The participants discussed how this proposal for an Indigenous Voice is different from ATSIC, and the positive aspects as well as challenges that ATSIC experienced.
 - It was clarified that while there are similarities between the Voice proposal and ATSIC, the Voice would not be delivering services or programs. At the national level, the Voice would be an advisory body.
 - A participant talked about how ATSIC did not always work at the grassroots level. The ATSIC regions had to compete with each other for funding from ATSIC.
- A participant noted that the people present in the room for this session are not representative of the diversity of Aboriginal people in Dubbo. It was discussed how important it is to engage with community who are not currently engaged, and to get the Voice proposal out to everyone in community.
 - It was clarified that the consultation session today is only the first step, and there are other opportunities and time to put forward ideas and provide feedback.
- Participants agreed that more funding for housing is critical.
- One participant said there will be opposition to this proposal because it will be perceived as government-led, unlike the Uluru Statement process which was community-led.
- It was agreed that having the time and resources to go and have your voice heard will be hard, as some people are unable to be released from work or have other commitments and are unable to attend during the day.
- It was discussed that the government needs to be willing to work with community. A participant said there is a barrier to participation and working with government for many Aboriginal people, as there is a difference between the two worlds. It should be about working together in a culturally appropriate way at the local level.



- Aboriginal people need a genuine partnership. The language in the proposal about ‘advice’ isn’t quite right, it is about empowerment. It is about decisions being made by the community, who hold the traditional knowledge.
- It was discussed how this proposal and process does not stop or replace community working towards a treaty.

Local and Regional Voices

- Participants agreed that the Local and Regional Voice must be designed by local and regional people, with respect for the local Traditional Owners. A participant noted that the community needs to get to design right at the grassroots level first, it needs to be a bottom up design.
 - It was agreed by the co-design members that the design will start at the local level first. How local people become a strong leadership group is up to the local people themselves.
 - It was acknowledged that this will need to be resourced.
 - A participant talked about how there are mechanisms and organisations in Dubbo to get community together, to take the opportunity to have their voice heard on what is good for them or not. The challenge is in getting the information out to all people. However, this could be used to come together to design and develop the Local and Regional Voice.
 - A participant noted how there are examples of clan groups coming together to discuss their group’s boundaries and develop structures from an Aboriginal perspective. A lot of these have an Elders Council built into them.
 - Participants noted the great diversity in Dubbo, with many people in town living off-country. This means it could take much time to bring community together to design and develop the Local and Regional Voice.
- Participants discussed how Aboriginal people at a grassroots level have come together and organised themselves previously. However, it is getting to that next stage of attaining government engagement where government listens and works with community that is hard. This way of working with grassroots people has fizzled out since the end of ATSIC.
- A participant pointed out that the ACT’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body (ATSIEB) is a good example of working with and talking to government.
- There was a lot of discussion and strong support for the principle of Non-duplication.
 - Participants pointed out the existing regional bodies and structures in which community has invested a lot. It was asked if there had been a review on what currently exists in the region?
 - Participants discussed how this could work with the NSW Local Decision Making initiative (‘LDM’ is an Aboriginal community governance initiative), that there would need to be a relationship between them. Local and Regional Voices would also need to work with land councils and local government.
 - It was also stated that community capacity building is required.
- One participant noted that youth appears to be missing from the proposal. They said the adults do not talk on behalf of their children, who have a different language and interpretation of being Aboriginal. There needs to be a strengthening of youth voices.
 - It was clarified there is a proposal as part of the National Voice for a Youth Advisory Group, and at the Local and Regional Voice level there could be mechanisms to create the space for young people to come together.
- A participant said the Local and Regional Voice needs to focus on the funding coming into a community and the region from all levels of government. The community could structure community services and funding better, to spend it in more beneficial ways and make it more accountable.
 - The co-design members clarified that advice on this would be a role of the Local and Regional Voice.



National Voice

- A participant stated that the membership models with two people per jurisdiction is not enough to actually represent urban, regional and remote.
- One participant said there is a lot of complexity around another national body, as there are so many existing national bodies. There would appear to be a lot of overlap and there needs to be an evaluation of what currently exists to see if it is working, before adding another structure. The question needs to be asked about what is the value-add of a new national body. Another participant stated that the Coalition of Peaks represents all the organisations in Australia.
 - It was clarified that the proposal for a National Voice comes from a lengthy process that led to the Uluru Statement, and a subsequent parliamentary committee inquiry, which made recommendations to co-design the Voice, and the government committed to this co-design process.
 - It was agreed there are a lot of national bodies. However, the government is not obliged to consult them as they would be with the National Voice. The National Voice would provide an official and documented process for when a new law is introduced. This would show if there had been engagement with the Voice. The advice would be tabled if it was provided, and there would be accountability.
 - It was clarified that the Coalition of Peaks is made up of organisations, and focussed on service delivery, which is really important. However the Voice would be the broader community view and focussed on what the community decides it needs. “The dynamic changes in a discussion when people are focussed on culture and relationships rather than representing their service delivery policy area.” The Voice will look to give people a voice who currently do not have one. There is a difference between an organisation and a community. Not all organisations represent all people and not all community see themselves represented in organisations.
- One participant asked if the National Voice would be like a federal LDM? The participant discussed how Aboriginal people are sick of being on advisory boards. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people need to be at the table where decisions are made. Another participant said Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people need to be part of the policy development process, to influence the policy outcome.
- A participant asked how a National Voice member could comprehend all the diverse local and regional input to the national level, and how could their contribution be meaningful? It was stated that it would be competing voices at the table if the National Voice member does not reflect these local/regional views.
 - It was clarified that some local and regional issues need to be elevated to the national level but not every issue is elevated, where it can best be dealt with at the local and regional level. It was agreed that the Local and Regional Voices are critical to have an effective Indigenous Voice.
- Regarding membership composition of the National Voice, participants said that each state’s representatives need to suit the demographics of that state and that two representatives is not enough.
 - One participant said to base the boundaries and representation on clans.
- A participant stated that National Voice members must be there to represent community, not to be there for themselves.