

Indigenous Voice Community Consultation

Consultation session details

Wurundjeri country;

Melbourne, 14 April 2021, 12:30pm, Session 1

Number of participants: 14

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 14 participants and started with acknowledgment of country by Professor Tom Calma who led the discussion. Key points discussed are summarised below.

Overarching points

- Participants referenced the long history of the call for a voice, including in Victoria by William Cooper and noted his legacy.
- There was a strong view that the Voice was needed and would make a real difference, given most decisions about funding and services that are important to Indigenous communities continue to be made by non-Indigenous people, resulting in disempowerment. Participants also reflected on the history of invasion, atrocities and ongoing systemic racism.
- A view was expressed by a non-Indigenous participant that many non-Indigenous Australians will be supportive given the call for a voice is long standing. They also asked if broader community involvement will be needed once decisions have been made.
 - A co-design member gave their perspective that the need for non-Indigenous Australians to be involved will continue as the as the Voice has to be heard and everyone needs to be around the table.
- It was felt that the Yoo-rrook Justice Commission in Victoria could help to educate people, both non-Indigenous and Indigenous, and justice was needed before Australians can reconcile as a nation.
- It was suggested that marketing of the Voice will be crucial to ensure far and deep reach as part of accountability and transparency. This should include social media, and could also involve the music industry.

Local & Regional Voice

- Overall participants were supportive of the Local and Regional Voice proposals. It was noted that the arrangements could enhance the treaty processes underway in Victoria.
- One participant expressed their hope to see the voice becoming reality in the near future. [‘Hopefully I’ll see something before I go to the dreamtime’]
- A non-Indigenous participant provided their view, from a ‘devil’s advocate’ perspective, that the proposals looked complicated, inefficient, and would create new bureaucracy and confusion. They felt the case for a voice was not proven given the system works well as is, and a range of Indigenous organisations already receive funding to meet community needs. They also suggested one way to address any issues would be to



support more Aboriginal people getting into public service where they would be part of the existing decision making processes.

- Co-design members clarified the proposals would make the overall arrangements simpler not more complicated, and that the current system was not effective, but fragmented and hit and miss, as demonstrated by continuing significant disparity of outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.
- It was also stressed that Local and Regional Voice would not duplicate any existing local arrangements.
- It was clarified that under the Voice arrangements the existing role of Traditional Owners would not change and they will continue to make decisions on land matters. They would also be part of the Voice, which would work with all levels of government on regional priorities.
- Rationale behind the Data and Evidence-based Decision Making principle was discussed, focusing on challenges with access to data held by governments, lack of coordination and the need for more meaningful data that is owned by the community.
- Overall participants supported the proposed principles. There was support for streamlining arrangements as much as possible, looking holistically at the bigger picture, openness and transparency. One participant felt that the principles should explicitly acknowledge sovereignty of Indigenous voices.
- It was considered that a direct dialogue between the voice co-design process and the Victorian Assembly was needed.
- Challenges in engaging with grass roots community members were noted, related to reluctance to engage in large structures, including community organisations.
- Some participants suggested regions be based on language groups and nations, with some 35 in Victoria. Another participant queried if the proposed number of regions for Victoria could be increased from 2 to 5 given the Victorian Assembly has 5 regions.
- The need for local governments to work with Local and Regional Voices was supported. It was noted that under recent legislative changes in Victoria local governments are required to engage with Traditional Owners through 'deliberative engagement'.
- There was strong support for Indigenous people living off their country to also have a voice and be included in the arrangements.
- A participant supported Local and Regional Voice ability to deal with issues on the ground, given that 'rubber hits the road' at the local level.

National Voice

- There was discussion about the provisions in the constitution relevant to National Voice proposals, including the race power, with different perspectives on its ongoing relevance. Co-design members clarified that this was outside the co-design groups' Terms of Reference.
- There was support for the balance of male and female members. In response to a question about other genders it was clarified that the National Voice would be able to establish other committees as required, including drawing from the LGBTQ+ community.
- It was queried how the selection process in model 1 could be done democratically. A co-design member suggested an EOI process could be used, with some senior independent people assessing candidates and making decisions.
- It was queried if the Voice would have a seat at COAG (now National Cabinet). A co-design member referred to the work of the Coalition of the Peaks and Closing the Gap, indicating it is intended the Voice would coalesce a lot of voices so they can be amplified.

[Key quote: 'We can talk about the past but we're here now. We're at cross roads, it's about justice, need to get this across the line.']