

# Indigenous Voice Community Consultation

## Consultation session details

Kariyarra country,

Port Hedland, 14 April 2021, 9.30am, session 2

Number of participants: 9

## 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 9 participants. Wayne Miller acknowledged that the meeting was held on Kariyarra Country. Key points discussed are summarised below.

### *Overarching points*

- A number of participants expressed frustration with government failures to address issues that were affecting the community. Deaths in custody, domestic violence, welfare, extreme poverty and unemployment were identified as major issues impacting the community. Some participants felt a lack of progress being made, and felt that previous changes to Indigenous policy had not improved things for the community. Co-design members outlined how a voice could influence government and create positive change.
- There was a discussion about how voice structures could utilise technology to engage with the community. One participant suggested that an app could be used to collect the views and concerns of community members.
- One participant felt that it was important for the voice to be an opt-in arrangement, rather than forcing individuals or communities to participate in the structure.
- A participant queried how the voice co-design process relates to discussion around treaty. Co-design members noted that the current process was separate to treaties being progressed in some states.
- One participant put the view that there should be a voice, but that there should not be constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The participant viewed this as negatively impacting Aboriginal sovereignty.

### *Local & Regional Voice*

- Many participants spoke about barriers and lateral violence between different groups in the community and wanted to break these down. Participants saw the voice proposals as an opportunity to achieve this by bringing together different groups and organisations. Another participant said that members of the community should “agree to disagree and get on with it”.
- Several participants characterised WA as having fairly well established regional boundaries that were reflected in the old ATSIC regions, including the Pilbara region.

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- Many participants expressed the view that existing local & regional structures were inadequate and saw the voice proposals as an opportunity for change. At the same time, some members emphasised the role of the existing Pilbara Aboriginal Voice as providing a foundation for the Pilbara region, and noted that a number of community members have been progressing this work.
  - One participant provided some detailed reflections on the Pilbara Aboriginal Voice. The participant described how the body had emerged from bush meetings at Yule River. The participant felt that Pilbara Aboriginal Voice had been a positive vehicle for teaching culture and connecting people, and also advocating to governments on issues such as the WA heritage act and the cashless debit card. However the participant felt that a lack of resourcing had been a major challenge.
  - Several participants emphasised that the local & regional structure should be able to talk to both Commonwealth and WA government.
  - Several participants emphasised the importance of transparency in how money was being spent on programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. One participant felt that there was a lot of money coming into Port Hedland through mining, but that not much of it was benefiting the community on the ground. Participants discussed how a Local & Regional Voice could address this by monitoring money spent in the region and making sure it went to the benefit of the community.
  - Several participants identified the interaction between mainstream law and traditional law as a major challenge. Participants reflected on disagreements over who has cultural authority, and how cultural authority interacts with structures created under mainstream law. One participant described this as a sensitive and political area within the community, and noted that this was something that the community themselves had to address.
  - Participants put forward a number of ideas. One participant felt that the voice proposals had to be set up so that cultural leaders felt heard and respected, with respect reciprocated for people given authority as members of the Local & Regional Voice. Another participant emphasised the role of clear delineation. The role of the Local & Regional Voice would be to talk to government about services and laws, whereas cultural authorities would speak for separate issues of culture and country. Another participant emphasised the importance of separating native title from the voice proposals, noting that the local & regional voice should represent everyone, including traditional owners and other residents.
  - Several participants put emphasis on the inclusive participation principle as an important aspiration for the voice proposals.

### *National Voice*

- Participants reflected on how the voice of the community would flow up through the levels of the voice. There was a strong emphasis on making sure there was a connection between the conversation at the national level and the conversation on the ground.
- Participants discussed which method for selecting National Voice members was preferable. One participant suggested that it should be an election in the same way as for local, state and federal government. Another member outlined the benefits of having the regional leadership group come together to discuss and deliberate on who the best person to represent the region would be.
- One participant suggested that terms for National Voice members should begin in the middle of the term of the Commonwealth Parliament. The participant suggested that this would help prevent knowledge from being lost, and allow National Voice members to have built up some experience when engaging with the new Parliament after each election.
- One participant felt there were some challenges with the proposal for Torres Strait Islander members on the National Voice to represent Torres Strait Islander people living on the mainland. The participant felt that they would not be able to represent those mainland people if they only engaged with communities living on the islands. The participant suggested there could be a process for different regional voices to engage with the Torres Strait Islander people in their region and feed their views up to the Torres Strait Island member of the



National Voice. Other participants acknowledged and reflected on the importance of Torres Strait Islander people to the history of the Pilbara region and to its present-day Indigenous community.

- Participants discussed how they could ensure that there was transparency in how members were selected to the National level. One of the co-design members noted that, if the local & regional structures were set up with strong accountability and transparency, this would flow through to the national level.
- Participants discussed what would happen if someone with a position at the regional level was selected for the National Voice. They outlined two possible options – that they could be replaced, or that they could “wear two hats” and retain positions at both the regional and national levels. Several participants expressed a preference for national members to “wear two hats” so that they maintained a connection down to the local level. One participant expressed this as “keeping your feet on the ground”.