

Indigenous Voice Community Consultation

Consultation session details

Kamilaroi, Gomeroi and Gamilaraay country,

16 March 2021 West Tamworth Leagues Club, 1pm.


Number of participants: 19

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 19 participants. Uncle Leonard Waters gave a welcome to country. Kristal Kinsela was lead facilitator, assisted by Chris Kenny. Key points discussed are summarised below.

- Participants started with a contextual conversation to situate consideration of Voice proposals.
 - They noted historical Government policies and programs since the 1950s which eroded cultural governance structures held by the old people.
 - As a starting point, it is important for people to acknowledge who they are, where they come from and those old ways.
 - It would be a good thing to listen to the Voices of those old people that are still alive in country.
 - Participants agreed that a strong understanding of the old ways is the best guide for future governance arrangements.
- Participants expressed concern that people in Sydney and Canberra with no legitimate connection to country in this area make decisions about what happens here.
- Participants also expressed the importance that when Local and Regional Voices come together and speak clearly, they need to be listened to by governments.
- There was wide ranging discussion about the best way of deciding regional boundaries, and the best way for communities with regions – especially small ones – to have a voice.
- Several participants expressed discomfort with the term ‘region’ – which is not an Indigenous way of thinking. It was suggested Aboriginal nations, or groups of people with shared Dreamings be used as the starting point for consideration of how people might come together, perhaps as clan groups.
- Overall, there was a sense that attempting to group people using a non-Indigenous concept or work through a ‘western lens’ is part of what creates tension and division among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Participants noted some of the positive aspects of previous models, including ATSIC to enable more formal governance arrangements.
- There was support for holistic approaches to service delivery and an acknowledgement that there are a lot of existing peak bodies providing advice to government across a whole range of issues. This does not guarantee that anybody listens to their advice.

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- Participants expressed fatigue at having another conversation about how to be heard by government. At the same time, participants agreed that optimism was important and the alternative was not a good option. We don't want to give up and lose who we are.
 - Participants acknowledged that any existing organisations could maintain their own identity regardless of any new Local and Regional Voice arrangements that may be established.
 - Participants raised the issue of resourcing and emphasised that adequate support will be need for Local and Regional Voices to do their work. There were questions about whether there would be funding from state or commonwealth, and discussion about the importance of an integrated approach.
 - Participants expressed broad support for the principles set out in the Local and Regional Voice proposal as a starting point, but suggested they be treated as a 'living' document – not set in cement but able to be revisited and amended if needed.
 - There was strong support for accountability for outcomes and that existing accreditation systems for services are good but do not guarantee practical outcomes even when they are met.
 - One participant expressed concern that it would be difficult for small communities to meet the expectations of all the principles, and there was further discussion about the need for support, particularly in areas where there are no existing arrangements.
 - Some participants expressed strong support for gender balance in National Voice membership. One participant suggested suitability for the role rather than gender should be the primary consideration.
 - There was strong support for a 'bottom-up' or grassroots approach to determining membership, noting that it is important for smaller, more remote communities to be heard. Generally these locations have less access to programs and services.
 - One participant suggested that National Voice should take an active role in drafting legislation and then presenting it to the Minister or Parliament to progress. They noted there are sufficient levels of capability and education in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to do that kind of work.
 - Noting the principle of empowerment, participants agreed it would be good to take a proactive approach to raising issues if importance that does not rely on the Minister or Government deciding that that legislation is needed.
 - Participants were concerned about the longevity of Voice arrangements, noting the history of governments disbanding Aboriginal representative bodies. There was strong support for inclusion in the constitution to assist with this issue, but some wariness that there would not be sufficient support across the Australian community for a referendum to be successful.
 - Participants were supportive of the proposal for Youth Advisory Committee, and welcomed the involvement of school students in the consultations and the Voice arrangements more broadly.
 - One participant noted that it will also be important to capture the perspectives of young people currently away from home pursuing higher education in the major centres.
 - Young people in the juvenile justice system are another cohort that need to be included, involved and able to have a voice.
 - Participants agreed that young people need representatives that actively seek their views, not assume what they need.
 - There was discussion about greater education in schools regarding political science to better equip young people to step into these roles, and understand how the system works.
 - It was suggested that it would be useful to distribute information to all schools about the Voice consultation process and encourage young people to make submissions.