

# Indigenous Voice Community Consultation

## Consultation session details

Kamilaroi, Gomeroi and Gamilaraay country,

16 March 2021 West Tamworth Leagues Club, 6pm.


Number of participants: 6

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

- The conversation opened with discussion about challenges associated with deciding regional boundaries for Local and Regional Voices. Views expressed included:
  - population size should be key factor, noting areas with lots of people need a strong voice.
  - Indigenous nations as the starting point, noting a lot of people do not live on country so this can be difficult too.
  - Data collection systems often dictate where money goes. Are there ways to use and share that data a lot better? Noting the story behind the data is just as important.
- Participants discussed the need to make sure the Voice has weight – to ensure advice is prioritised, including from regional and remote places. There should be ongoing consultation and feedback so local people know what’s happened with that advice.
- Participants noted that in some places there are a lot of existing arrangements, but there is a missing line of sight to communities. We need to find the right formula so those people ‘up there’ can clearly see and respond to the needs of communities.
- Decision makers must really listen – take off their blinkers and see advice through a different lens. Strong agreement that communities and all levels of government need to work together to achieve change.
- One participant expressed a view regarding National Voice membership that was agreed by all: *“If you’re going to chuck up my voice I want you to be accountable for what happens with that and how it’s represented. We want to be able to see it in front of us.”*
- Participants identified challenges faced by Indigenous organisations competing with mainstream service providers.
  - There are gaps in capability support to be competitive, and funding systems do not recognise the genuine contribution made by many local Aboriginal organisations / businesses.

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- It can be difficult to meet evidence requirements that attract funding. There seems to be an expectation that Aboriginal service providers should deliver services for free, particularly for trauma and healing.
  - Participants are inspired by what local Aboriginal organisations are achieving with not much money.
  - Participants noted Aboriginal Liaison Workers are relied on to fill gaps in what can be a racist or culturally inappropriate health system. Remuneration for these role does not match the expertise, pressure and workload.
  - Support for greater accountability of paid workers at the community level, particularly when many local people work on a volunteer basis.
- Participants agreed that adequate government resourcing will be essential to enable local communities to design their local and regional arrangements, and then for operation once established.
  - Participants were keen to emphasise that Local and regional voices need financial support and not just the National Voice.
  - Participants agreed governance structures of existing Aboriginal service providers were not sufficient for an inclusive local and regional voice, because the majority of Aboriginal people do not use those services.
  - There was discussion about the need for structures that enable local Aboriginal organisations to collaborate rather than compete for funding. Would like unspent funds to be directed to community priorities rather than returned to government consolidated revenue.
  - One participants stated: *“I endorse the local and regional voice idea. Don’t know how to mark the regions – that’s a broader community discussion. But we haven’t had a voice for so long – we need to hurry and make decisions about regions – because something is better so we can get a voice happening, even if it doesn’t look exactly as everyone wants.”* There was broad support for this sentiment.
  - Participants were very positive about the National Voice proposal which they agreed would be empowering and should be legislated. They noted the challenge of elected representatives being taken away from important community based jobs, and leaving capability gaps at that level.
  - Participants recalled that a strength of ATSIC was its connections with Indigenous groups in other countries, and international engagement.
  - Participants liked the idea of small, yet very active National Voice with capacity to reach down deep into communities and be accountable to them. They would like robust criteria for selection.
  - Participants liked the broad scope for the National Voice and wide range of issues of national importance they could be involved in.
  - They were undecided on the direct election or appointments from Local and Regional Voices was best but emphasised the ability to be held accountable and challenged by constituents at the local level was most important.
  - One participant suggested it would be good for the National Voice to produce regular traffic light reports – updated monthly. These would clearly and quickly show the status of agreed projects so local people across the country could easily see what’s happening on the issues that matter to them.
  - The group acknowledged it would be a challenging role for the National Voice representatives and highlighted the importance of a safety framework with built in mental health to support members.
  - Participants agreed with a Youth Advisory body, but were keen to ensure that old people were well cared for. They were happy with the wording of the Cultural Leadership principle in the Local and Regional Framework. They supported the concept of appointees based on relevant expertise, but did not think these should outnumber the other members. Nor should they be unilaterally appointed by the Minister.
  - Participants were keen for an Indigenous Voice to promote greater support for Indigenous businesses.