

Indigenous Voice Community Consultation

Consultation session details

Kaurareg people,

Thursday Island, 14 May 2021, 10:30am

Number of participants: 51

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 51 participants who were welcomed to country by Uncle Saila Savage. There was also a prayer by Mrs Adidi to open the forum. Key points discussed are summarised below.

Overarching points

- The issue of Torres Strait Islander families living on the mainland and how they were to be represented on the voice was seen as critical. One participant said that the connection with ‘mainland families is very important to us’ but also noted it was essential that if they are speaking for the Torres Strait they are connected with the ‘culture and our leaders.’
- A participant noted that there is a large number of strong women leaders across the Torres Strait and they will be a key part of the voice.
- There was a comment that children are the leaders of tomorrow and they should be involved in these discussions as they will own the outcomes that come from it – ‘youth are the Generals of the next day. They know what is going to happen.’
- One person acknowledged that ‘we are all First Nations peoples with our Aboriginal brothers and sisters.’

Local & Regional Voice

- There was acknowledgement that the Torres Strait continues to have strong voices through the Torres Strait Regional Authority and its local councils and that any arrangements would build on this.
- The Co-Design members said that the experiences of the Torres Strait were drawn upon heavily when looking at what has happened and what is happening to give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people a voice. Those learnings helped to develop the proposals set out in the Interim Report.
- It was pointed out that other regions around the country don’t have the same mechanisms in place as the Torres Strait and that in many cases this will have to be developed if government supports Local and Regional Voices.
- People said that more discussion would be needed on how the existing voices for Torres Strait Islander people (TSRA, Council and Prescribed Body Corporate) would fit into a Local and Regional Voice arrangement if these are established.



National Voice

- Due to the strong nature of Local/Regional bodies in the Torres Strait, there was more discussion on the National Voice and how representation would be determined from the region.
- People were very clear that at least two representatives from the Torres Strait would be required in order to give gender balance and reflecting that the Torres Strait Islander people are a unique people and culturally distinct.
- There were discussions on how this representation could be determined including whether one would come from the east region and one from the west, or whether one would be from the Torres Strait Islands and another would be drawn from the families living on the mainland. People discussed whether they should use:
 - Appointment by their current bodies,
 - Expression of interests; or
 - A separate election.
- There was no resolution of this issue which most people felt would need more discussion.
- A participant asked what these representatives would bring back to the community and Co-Design members explained there would be a two-way flow of information – issues at the local level that required national, systemic policy change being elevated to the National Voice while the National Voice would also seek advice from the local level on the various national policy matters they would consider.
- Participants felt that good communication would be essential if their people were going to have trust, not only in government but in the members who are speaking on their behalf – ‘we need people with strong voices to speak for us.’
- A participant said that communications must be ‘simple, user friendly and done in such a way that all families can see it.’ They said that it was important that people understand the role of the National Voice members so they have the right expectations and don’t get disappointed and lose trust in them.
- A Co-Design member advised participants that while representatives would come from the Torres Strait they would be members of a National Voice and would need to look at national issues from a national perspective – ‘they will need to make decisions and provide advice on behalf of all First Nations people.’
- There was discussion on the quality of the people who would represent the Torres Strait and the importance of making sure that ‘we don’t put the wrong people in.’