

Indigenous Voice Community Consultation

Consultation session details

Gumbaynggirr country,

Coffs Harbour, 17 March 2021, 9.30am, Session 2

Number of participants: 17

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 17 participants and Aunty Irene Laurie gave a Welcome to Country. Key issues discussed are summarised below.

- All participants agreed on the need for a Voice as there was a need for a stronger voice. This proposal appeared to be the way to get this stronger voice. Many participants also stated there is a sense of urgency to do this now. Participants said they are getting older and really need this proposal to work. They don't want to get their young ones' hopes up if it will just be abolished in the future.
- Participants stressed that the structure must be legislated so that it cannot be abolished
- All participants agreed that the word "indigenous" did not align with their identity
- Participants spoke of the need to come together as a community as well. That community needs to heal division.
 - Community needs to know "what we want in having the Voice", "we need to know what we are talking about, we need a credible voice. We want to be heard. We as Aboriginal people can solve Aboriginal problems".
 - The Voice is the opportunity to do this, and to take on government departments around their commitment to our people.
- Participants expressed a lack of trust in politicians. Participants shared examples where they contacted local members and Ministers for help but not receiving responses.
- Participants asked if there was a commitment to the Voice proposal and if it would be guaranteed. All participants agree that the Government needs to make a long-term commitment to the Voice. The Government needs to allow flexibility, to expect teething problems, and reform if needed, but don't abolish it altogether if it is working well. It will require time to establish, mature and evolve.
 - "If we go to the trouble of setting up something - then it better not have the guts ripped out of it because it is going through some troubles"
 - "A lot of people are tired or being promised structures and then governments change their minds and it is gone"
 - Participants noted that the Closing the Gap targets are all long term, because there are no quick fixes. Therefore, community needs to do it their way and take time.



- Participants expressed that ATSIC and other previous bodies worked well, and continue to work well such as Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly.
- The participants discussed ATSIC and the need for community to reflect on what worked well and what led to the downfall of ATSIC. Participants agreed that ATSIC was a great body with the strength in the regional councils. ATSIC spoke to all levels of governments. All the councils were different.
- Participants agreed that a voice to local government is critical, as well as to state and federal governments.
- Participants noted treaty and truth-telling are also very important aspects of the Uluru Statement.
- Participants also noted that the government needs to reform its way of working with community and needs cultural competency.
- Participants brought up the lack of services in small communities and how hard it is to talk to governments to provide those services.

Local and Regional Voices

- Participants supported the principle of Inclusive Participation. Every community is different and has their leadership, Elders, and young people, who need to be heard as much as the Elders.
- Participants agreed that it is critical community designs the local voice, but require resourcing to come together.
- Participants said the government needs to be accountable, but community also needs to be accountable.
- It was also discussed the need for ongoing resourcing of the Local and Regional Voices. It was noted that people already have jobs and it is hard for people to take on additional responsibilities at the local level to provide input to the regional level. Every community will need a strong voice with secretariat support who can respond to every question.
- Participants supported the Principle of Non-Duplication and linking with existing bodies. They noted in NSW there is a need to link to LDM and land councils. Participants wondered how the Local and Regional Voices would interact with the groups already established. It was noted that LDM certainly wouldn't be in opposition to the proposal. It should have alignment with all existing arrangements and structures, and policies.
- Participants also wondered how the Local and Regional Voices would work with Native Title, as this is critically important and those rights have only just been attained. As well as working with NSW land rights.
- One participant noted that there shouldn't be a boundary between NSW and the ACT, just as there wasn't in the old ATSIC region.
- One participant shared a view that there should be a reserved seat on the local government, as a councillor. To have someone in a decision-making role.

National Voice

- Participants asked where the cultural elements in the National Voice proposal were and noted the National Voice must come to matters from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural perspective. It was noted that cultural leadership is important at the national level as well. The National Voice must have this leadership and guidance and align with native title and land council aspirations.
- The National Voice must speak to legislation. It must also speak on education and health matters.
- Participants said there were two tiers of government missing from the National Voice proposal. It must bring local government to the table.
- Participants noted there needs to be legislation around engagement with the Voice.
- Participants wanted definitions around words such as 'obligated' and 'expected' in defining the relationship between the National Voice and the Government.