

Indigenous Voice Community Consultation

Consultation session details

Warumungu country,

Tennant Creek, 5 May 2021, 10.00am - 12.00pm, session 1

Number of participants: 23

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 23 participants who were welcomed to country by Pat Brahim. Key points discussed are summarised below.

Overarching points

- Participants expressed hope that the Indigenous Voice would result in new faces speaking for people, “not the same old faces”. One participant said, “we need younger, local ones”.
- Participants spent some time discussing the NT’s unique challenges, particularly in the context of the NT Government’s more limited jurisdictional powers than states. They noted that these challenges would need to be addressed to give communities confidence that the Indigenous Voice will be workable.
- Similarly, participants agreed they would need concrete evidence of how the Indigenous Voice would be different from past versions of representation, none of which have stuck around long enough to lead to lasting change. The structure would need to have a strong legislative framework to give them the confidence that it will lead to change. One participant stated that “This thing should have teeth. If it doesn’t have teeth, it becomes a gummy shark”.
- One participant commented on the pitfalls of governance structures being established and controlled by governments, stating that “if our mob are going to have a voice, it has to be *our* voice, has to start with us”.
- One participant questioned how much the Indigenous Voice structures would cost. Co-design members noted the number of variables still being designed, such as the number of National Voice representatives and number of Local and Regional Voices, which will affect these figures. Participants agreed it is important for the Indigenous Voice to be set up and resourced properly.


Local & Regional Voice

- Participants expressed scepticism at the potential for the Indigenous Voice to influence government both at the territory and federal level. One participant said that “the government has to change the way they operate for us to feel that this stuff here is something we look forward to in the future”. Participants agreed that integrity and trust go both ways.

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- Participants were supportive of Local and Regional Voices participating in decision making, particularly in the context of additional resourcing coming into non-Aboriginal ‘mainstream’ organisations in Tennant Creek to address recent issues. One participant said that “nothing’s changed in this town, that’s why we need the local voice with local people on there, so those local people can determine where the money goes”.
 - Participants agreed national policies should be adaptable to each region rather than one-size-fits-all. It was suggested that program guidelines and services should be designed specifically for each Local and Regional Voice region, with each region negotiating with government agencies about what these policies would look like for them and how services would be delivered – “What’s real and important for us on the ground isn’t necessarily what’s real and important for the rest of the NT”.
 - Participants discussed the potential for the Local and Regional Voice proposal to empower people in the Barkly region. One participant talked about the importance of the Local and Regional Voice empowering people through going out to the communities and town camps around Tennant Creek where people feel comfortable.
 - Participants discussed the balance of inclusive participation and cultural leadership in the region, agreeing on the importance of Traditional Owners as a foundational consideration for the region’s Local and Regional Voice.
 - One participant commented that ATSIC had allowed people to have a say wherever they lived and stated that “wherever our countrymen end up, their voice matters”, but also noted that “it has to be the countrymen that has the greatest say”.
 - Participants discussed the composition of a Barkly region, agreeing they thought it could be a standalone region. Participants noted current electoral and land council boundaries divide the region in two. One participant suggested looking at the Australian Bureau of Statistics’ Statistical Local Areas and service delivery footprints when determining regions. Another participant mentioned language boundaries, noting the difficulties faced by some language groups which are controlled by multiple different local government councils.
 - Participants talked about the importance of being able to trust the people at the table with the authority and responsibility to make decisions on their behalf, saying they need to have integrity as Aboriginal people. One participant raised the issue of people in leadership being “knocked down by our own mob”, while another asked, “How do we come together and be a unified voice? A voice isn’t about a whole lot of different people talking different messages – we have to come together to unify that voice”. Participants broadly agreed the proposed Local and Regional Voice model is a good starting point for coming together.

National Voice

- Participants expressed the importance of advice flowing up from the regional level to the national level and not getting lost. One participant spoke about the need to ensure there is enough time in the policy and legislation design process for advice to be sought from regions.
- One participant questioned who defines the criteria for what would be an ‘impact on Aboriginal people’. Co-design members confirmed that the National Voice would determine its own criteria, with formal advice specifically sought on, for example, legislation in development, whereas informal advice could be given where the National Voice decides there is an impact.
- Participants discussed the importance of the National Voice reaching a consensus on advice given to Parliament, noting the likelihood that members would have varying views.

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- One participant spoke about how policies can be made at a national level and imposed on communities despite consultation indicating they aren't the right solution. They asked whether the National Voice would have input to stop this kind of policy implementation. Co-design members noted there is no guarantee the National Voice's advice will be taken, but that this is about making inroads and ensuring there is a process of change.
 - Participants discussed the direct election and structural membership link models of selecting National Voice members. Two participants expressed the view that elections should not occur. One argued that "with elections, people vote with their heart, not their heads", while the other noted that "people with big families can get the wrong people in, stacking it". A third participant saw positives in both models. A fourth participant felt neither model fits with the Barkly region's cultural governance model of decision making, in which each of region's 12 language groups has its own cultural leadership and voice – "if we're going to be true about language, culture and maintaining that cultural decision making, that's the model for me".
 - One participant commented on the importance of having an independent secretariat rather than one run through a government agency such as NIAA.