



30 April 2021

Indigenous Voice Co-Design Groups

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La Perouse Aboriginal Community Alliance's response to the Interim Report to the Australian Government on Voice Co-design

The La Perouse Aboriginal Community Alliance

The La Perouse Aboriginal Community Alliance (the **Alliance**) is a network or governance table of local Aboriginal community-controlled organisations that provide services to the La Perouse Aboriginal Community.

Established in 2013, the Alliance allows organisations to coordinate and collaborate on planning, program and service delivery while coordinating avenues of communication with the Local, State and Commonwealth Governments who service our cultural area. The Alliance boundary mirrors the La Perouse Local Aboriginal Land Council boundary as set out in the NSW Aboriginal Land Rights Act (1983).

The Alliance has been working with the Commonwealth Government through the Empowered Communities initiative since 2016. During this time, we have progressed the First Priority Areas being the Mission Church Restoration, Gujaga Early Years Education Expansion and the Aged Care Feasibility Study projects.

In addition, the Alliance has recently engaged in the NSW Government Local Decision Making process where it aims to progress a number of Development Focus Areas.

The La Perouse Aboriginal Community

The La Perouse Aboriginal community was established in 1883 as a permanent Aboriginal settlement on the northern headland of Gamay/Kamay (Botany Bay) through the establishment of the NSW Aborigines Protection Board. The remaining Aboriginal people from camps around Sydney Harbour and Botany Bay at that time were relocated there.

In the late 1890's Aboriginal people living at La Perouse were described as:



For more than 20 years there has been a camp of aborigines near the village of La Perouse, on the northern shore of Botany Bay. They comprise of all that remains of the descendants of the native tribe that occupied the district at the time of the English occupation of New South Wales in 1788

Today, La Perouse is considered a discrete Aboriginal community which includes families with ancient and unbroken roots to coastal Sydney.

The Alliance's Position

As a Local Governance body, the Alliance chooses to limit its submission to the design of the Local and Regional Voice. In designing the Local and Regional Voice, it is the view of the Alliance that three guiding principles should be followed.

1. Led by Community Controlled Aboriginal Organisations

The Alliance defines Community Controlled Aboriginal Organisations as organisations which are Aboriginal controlled and linked to a particular Aboriginal community. We are of the firm view that meaningful local input can only be achieved through engagement of these community driven, placed based organisations. This is because:

- a) The nature of Community Controlled Aboriginal Organisations means that community members are able to become members of one or more organisations which fit their expertise or interest. It is this combination of connection to community and broad membership bases which ensure that the Local Voice is truly local;
- b) The community facing nature of these organisations increases the ability of the Local Voice framework to gather and feed the needs and concerns of Aboriginal people up to relevant government decision makers in a coherent manner. Failure to incorporate these community based perspectives increases the risk of decisions concerning Aboriginal people being made in an uninformed manner;
- c) Furthermore, these strong links to community ensure that the Community Controlled Aboriginal Organisations responsible for forming the Local Voice are accountable to their members. It is this accountability which ensures that input into government decision making concerning Aboriginal people is accurate and honest.



2. Correlation between authority of member organisations and authority of Local and Regional Voice

It is also important that the feedback provided to government is directly linked to the expertise and authority of the underlying organisations.

For example, should the organisations which underpin the Local and Regional Voice be primarily service delivery focused, so should its advice to government.

Failure to apply limitations such as this invites the following negative outcomes:

- a) Input can be uninformed and therefore not useful. For example, if a Local Voice mechanism is asked to provide advice to government on an educational matter, and there are no organisations with any expertise in education, the resulting advice would come from an uninformed position and would be likely to lead to detrimental outcomes for the community involved;
- b) Decisions may not be culturally appropriate. This is particularly relevant in regional centres and urban areas where organisations are often managed by Aboriginal people who have migrated from other areas. Relying on organisations such as this instead of traditional owners on matters relating to connection to country, language etc. is culturally offensive; and
- c) Further to this point, failing to set clear boundaries on who can advise on service delivery and can speak for country will create future friction between location-based service delivery organisations and traditional owners, which benefits neither group.

3. Informed by cultural boundaries and decision-making structures

When designing the structures that underpin the Local and Regional Voice, it is crucial that Region boundaries follow traditional boundaries as closely as possible. This is important for a number of reasons such as:

- a) This approach encourages cohesive decision making based on traditional cultural connections. For example, when grouping local bodies such as the Alliance with other local bodies in order to create a Voice Region, it is best to group communities with a cultural connection to La Perouse such as those in Wollongong and the Illawarra. This is because, despite being isolated from each other due to Protectionism, these communities are linked by language, cultural and kinship ties which enhances the potential for collaborative decision making;



- b) In addition to this, building Voice Regions on top of traditional boundaries enhances likelihood of commonality of purpose within each Region. For example, it may seem logical to group our community, who have a traditional connection to Coastal Sydney, with Aboriginal communities in Western Sydney due to the modern concept of the Greater Sydney region. However, if this Greater Sydney approach was to be taken, cultural differences will likely cause divergence in priorities and undermine the strength of the Regional Voice.

A prime example of this is the importance the La Perouse Aboriginal community places on caring for sea country. This priority is unlikely to be shared by Aboriginal communities in Western Sydney due to their lack of traditional or contemporary connection to salt water and may result in a misaligned Regional body; and

- c) Finally, creating Regional Voice boundaries according to traditional boundaries removes friction for future treaty negotiations. This is because, in order for a treaty to be truly an agreement between government and First Nations, they can only be negotiated by members of that Nation who have the right to speak for their Nation's country. Opting to create Regional Voice boundaries which conflict with the traditional boundaries of First Nations would only add to the already complicated overlapping of Native Title, Land Rights and government systems. We understand that, in regional and remote areas, the Traditional Owner groups and Aboriginal service providers often have common membership bases. However, due to the high number of Aboriginal people living in urban areas, it is important that these boundaries are clearly set to encourage harmony between Aboriginal groups who can then focus energy and resources towards the advancement of Aboriginal people.

END

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