

A Proposal to Simplify the Passage Ideas from Local and Regional Voices to the National Parliament

'The Direct Input Model'

- What follows works within proposed national and regional voice structures. It addresses only how the National Voice to Parliament might best be made to work. This proposal therefore does not offer ideas on how Local and Regional Voices will interact with other levels of government. ('Regional Voice' is used below to cover both Local and Regional Voices)
- So what is the problem to be fixed? I see information being lost when there is a filtering, or amalgamation, of views at the regional level. I suspect Senators and House members would like a Voice to Parliament to give them raw data, not a regional consensus, or the views of regional chairs, even though chair opinions are 'informed' by their regional groups. The same problem arises at National Voice level- what value is there in National Voice giving its own views to Parliament, even though those views will be influenced by regional input? A further difficulty arises if the election process of both Regional and National Voices attract political-party based electioneering: input from a Voice may be directed by party heads to merely reflect the policy position of the 'winning' party.
- The Proposal:
 - The process would start by National Voice choosing which bills (or issues raised at Parliamentary enquiries) require input from Regional Voices. Bills would be classed by the National Voice as either major (from an Indigenous viewpoint) bills or lesser bills. For lesser bills, Regional Voice input would be handled by the National Voice alone, e.g. by submitting broad topics which should be addressed by Parliament to cater for Indigenous viewpoints.
 - For major bills, however, the National Voice would develop a series of questions in the explanatory memorandum. The aim of these questions would be to allow each member of Regional Voices the opportunity to provide opinions on the bill. Those opinions, once amalgamated by a software package, would be the only input made to the National Parliament (with the exception of a short summary added by the National Voice-see below).
 - Voice input into explanatory memoranda would follow the precedent set by the current requirement for all bills to contain a statement of compatibility with human rights.
 - The Voice questions would be in multiple choice form, prepared by experts in developing evaluation questions. (Private companies use such experts regularly to gauge customer reaction to their products.). Questions could be in various forms- examples: 'How do you feel about Aspect A of the bill?'
 - Strongly don't like Neutral Strongly like
 - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

And another example

'Place the following in order of the importance to you in relation to Aspect A of the bill':

- Health
- Family cohesion
- Cost to your family
- Long term community benefit

- Impact on children's education
 - Personal freedoms
 - Your own happiness and mental well being
 - Impact on climate
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- The response by individual Regional Voice members to the multiple choice questions would be captured by smart phone or pc. (Web privacy controls would be required.)
 - There would no input from Regional Voices meeting as a group, or from the chairs (except through a chair's right to participate as a member of that regional voice). Nor would there be visibility of individual respondents to anyone. The aggregate of regional responses (aggregated by the questionnaire provider's software) would, however, be visible to regional chairs. At a national level, there would be visibility to both National Voice members, and Parliamentarians, of aggregate regional responses, including from which area a particular aggregated regional response originated.
 - For parliamentary enquiries (and similar) which the National Voice felt that regional input was appropriate, the National Voice would prepare multiple choice questions, as for bills.
 - National Voice could add a covering (max 600 words?) comment on, or assessment of, the regional results, to be included with the summarized multiple choice data, before it is made available to members of Parliament.
 - Results of the regional input would be released initially only to members of the Senate and the House of Reps. Results would then be formally released to the media one month later, to allow Parliamentarians time to consider the implications of the Voice data.
 - The proposal would not entail the development of new software. Professional questionnaire providers will have their own software that can fulfill the requirements of a questionnaire-and-response process. Any attempt to change current software to produce a Voice- bespoke version should be avoided, even if that requires minor modifications to the proposed process.
- Advantages of this Direct Input Model:
 - The structures put forward in the report 'Indigenous Voice Stage 2' are utilised.
 - The value of regional opinions is maximised. Regional Voices would play an important role in informing members of the issues involved in a particular bill.
 - No problems or disputes should arise over the voting methods to be used at Regional Voice level, as there will be no voting, no Regional Voice position.
 - At National Voice also, problems in selecting voting methods will be reduced, as there is no need to amalgamate inputs from Regional Voices- done automatically by software. (Other aspects of the work of the National Voice may still require an internal voting framework, e.g. selection of those aspects of a bill for which regional input will be sought.)
 - Standardisation of Regional Voice structures is not required. It does not matter if the membership numbers of Regional Voices vary greatly, or if selection procedures differ. Whoever is on a Regional Voice has a direct say.

- By developing the multiple choice questions, National Voice retains control and oversight of the Voice to Parliament.

