



Australian Government  
National Indigenous  
Australians Agency



Indigenous Voice

# Indigenous Voice Co-design Process

Final Report to the  
Australian Government

July 2021



## 2018 Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples: Final Report

### Recommendation 1

In order to achieve a design for The Voice that best suits the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the Committee recommends that the Australian Government initiate a process of co-design with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The co-design process should:

- consider national, regional and local elements of The Voice and how they interconnect;
- be conducted by a group comprising a majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and officials or appointees of the Australian Government;
- be conducted on a full-time basis and engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations across Australia, including remote, regional, and urban communities;
- outline and discuss possible options for the local, regional, and national elements of The Voice, including the structure, membership, functions, and operation of The Voice, but with a principal focus on the local bodies and regional bodies and their design and implementation;
- consider the principles, models, and design questions identified by this Committee as a starting point for consultation documents; and
- report to the Government within the term of the 46th Parliament with sufficient time to give The Voice legal form.

### Joint Select Committee principles for the design of the Indigenous Voice

- Most significant is the strong support for local and regional structures.
- The members of the Local & Regional Voice should be chosen by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people rather than appointed by the government.
- The design of the Local & Regional Voices should reflect the varying practices of different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities—a Canberra-designed ‘one-size-fits-all’ model would not be supported.
- There should be equal gender representation.
- The Indigenous Voice at the local, regional, and national level should:
  - be used by state, territory and local governments as well as the federal government
  - provide oversight, advice and plans but not necessarily administer programs or money
  - provide a forum for people to bring ideas or problems to government and government should be able to use the Indigenous Voices to road test and evaluate policy. This process should work as a dialogue where the appropriateness of policy and its possible need for change should be negotiable.
- Consideration must be given to the interplay of any Indigenous Voice body with existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations at both local and national levels (in areas such as health, education and law) and how such organisations might work together.
- Cross-border communities should be treated as being in the same region where appropriate.
- Advice should be sought at the earliest available opportunity.

# Executive Summary

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have long called for a greater say on the services, policies and laws that affect their lives to overcome their present level of exclusion from decision-making about the matters that affect them. This Indigenous Voice Co-design Process Final Report to the Australian Government is the culmination of a robust and contested process to design the details of an Indigenous Voice, as recommended by the 2018 Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

This Final Report marks a milestone in the co-design of an Indigenous Voice. The proposals from the Indigenous Voice Co-design Process Interim Report to the Australian Government, developed in stage one of the co-design process, have been tested and refined through a significant public consultation engaging more than 9,400 people and organisations, in stage two of the co-design process. The final proposals and recommendations in this report are the product of a genuine and thorough co-design, led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and undertaken in partnership with Government.

This Final Report presents the proposals and recommendations for an Indigenous Voice—a cohesive and integrated system comprised of Local & Regional Voices and a National Voice—with connections to existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander bodies. This Final Report also presents considerations for implementing an Indigenous Voice and details the consultation and engagement process.

This Final Report summarises the work of the 3 co-design groups throughout the co-design process spanning 18 months, focusing on the consultation and engagement recommended in the Interim Report. The 52 co-design group members, most of whom are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, brought a remarkable range of experience and expertise to their roles. As part of working together with government, representatives of the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) were included in the membership of co-design groups. The Chief Executive Officer and Deputy Chief Executive Officer Operations and Delivery were co-chairs of the National and Local & Regional Co-design Groups, respectively. The NIAA also provided secretariat support to co-design members throughout the process.

*The Local & Regional Co-design Group's role was to articulate effective regional mechanisms for improved local and regional decision-making by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in partnership with governments, including building on what is already working well in regions across Australia.*

*The National Co-design Group's role was to develop models for a National Voice, including how it should link to Local & Regional Voices.*

*The Senior Advisory Group's role was to guide the process, including the public consultation process and to provide advice to the co-design groups as they developed the proposals.*

Using the proposals in the Interim Report as a foundation, the co-design groups developed the final proposals for Local & Regional Voices and a National Voice with careful deliberation, allowing the views of all members to be raised, discussed and considered. Co-design members led the public consultation and engagement process on the proposals and considered feedback as it emerged throughout the process. The final proposals represent either the unanimous or clear majority view of the co-design groups.

Throughout the co-design process, and as detailed in Chapter 4 of the Interim Report, the co-design groups were conscious of learning from preceding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander bodies with advisory and advocacy functions, for example, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples. Throughout consultation, people recalled the strengths and achievements of these bodies but also reflected on their shortcomings and disappointments. The co-design groups continued to reflect on the learnings from these previous arrangements in developing the final proposals.

A Senior Officials Group comprised of representatives from each state and territory government, the Australian Local Government Association, and the Australian Government as represented by the NIAA, was linked to the co-design process. The Senior Officials Group acted as a forum for governments to contribute input and advice to inform the co-design process, particularly in relation to the implications of Local & Regional Voices. It was also a forum to provide officials from the non-Commonwealth levels of government with information about the co-design process, reflecting the vital importance of Local & Regional Voices being a voice from local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to all levels of government.



## Local & Regional Voices

The approach for Local & Regional Voices presented in the Interim Report was strongly supported throughout the consultation and engagement process. The flexibility to tailor Local & Regional Voices to local circumstances, guided by a principles-based framework, resonated strongly throughout the community consultation sessions. Flexibility was seen as essential to ensure that Local & Regional Voice arrangements can respond to the great diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities across Australia. The need for all levels of government to participate in Local & Regional Voice arrangements as set out in the Interim Report was further reinforced and emphasised throughout consultation. There was a high level of awareness in community consultation sessions that the policies, programs and services of all governments affect communities and that they would all need to be engaged in Local & Regional Voice arrangements.

Given the strong support for the overall approach during consultation and engagement, the final proposal for Local & Regional Voices represents a refinement rather than a significant change from what was proposed in the Interim Report.

A principles-based framework for Local & Regional Voices across Australia, as proposed in this Final Report, is predicated on recognising that the enhanced arrangements for local and regional decision-making and regional governance would be the key to the success of the Indigenous Voice proposal overall. This was strongly affirmed throughout the consultation process. The framework, with 9 guiding principles, builds on existing arrangements across Australia and provides flexibility to accommodate the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities. Local & Regional Voices would be community-led<sup>1</sup>, community-designed and community-run. The proposal articulates the need for communities to be supported to act as an independent voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working with governments. *Respectful long-term partnerships*—one of the 9 principles in the framework—was also strongly supported throughout the consultation process. Most people acknowledged the need for change so that government officials engage in partnerships across governments and portfolios and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Local & Regional Voices would undertake community engagement, provide advice to, and work in partnership with all levels of government. They would work together to set strategic directions to improve policy, program and service delivery outcomes for communities in the region and provide joint advice about how investment can be better aligned to local priorities and strategies (referred to as ‘shared decision-making’). A flexible approach allows the breadth of functions, membership and governance arrangements to be decided locally, providing they are consistent with what is set out in the framework. The arrangements would evolve in line with community preferences and capacity. Local & Regional Voices would work cooperatively with and not displace or undermine existing bodies. Local & Regional Voices would also provide clear links for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to be involved in government decision-making at the local and regional level. Local & Regional Voices could also play a key practical role in communities to support improved outcomes, in line with the Closing the Gap agenda.

All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents (including both historical residents<sup>2</sup> and traditional owners) of a region would have the opportunity for their voices to be heard. The final proposal recommends the following guiding principles that would apply both to Local & Regional Voices and government at all levels, including across all portfolios.

- *Empowerment*
- *Inclusive Participation*
- *Cultural Leadership*
- *Community-led Design*
- *Non-duplication and Links with Existing Bodies*
- *Respectful Long-term Partnerships*
- *Transparency and Accountability*
- *Capability Driven*
- *Data and Evidence-based Decision Making.*

<sup>1</sup> The term ‘community’ in this report refers to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents in a geographic area.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Historical residents’ commonly refers to all residents who are not traditional owners of the given area, irrespective of when they moved to that community.

The final proposal for Local & Regional Voices to be established at the regional level is intended to maximise efficiency and effectiveness. At the same time, connection to the community level would be essential to ensure local people and communities can provide input to decisions about local issues.

The Interim Report proposed that feedback be sought on a range of region numbers—25 as a minimum and 35 as a maximum. Based on strong support during consultation for a greater number of regions within this proposed range, the members agreed that 35 regions across Australia would be necessary to accommodate the complexities of implementing the Indigenous Voice proposals. Consultation feedback confirmed it was important for communities to be involved in further discussions about the configurations of regions.

In line with this feedback, the final proposal provides for detailed boundaries to be determined by communities and governments at the beginning of the implementation phase. Boundaries would be determined within the agreed numbers and considering factors such as cultural groupings, existing regional arrangements, demographics and geography.

The final proposals for Local & Regional Voices, including further detail on the recognition process and deliberations of the Local & Regional Co-design Group, are presented in Chapter 1 of this report.

## National Voice

The proposal for a National Voice was strongly supported during the consultation and engagement process. Key considerations raised during consultation included how membership for the National Voice would be determined, the number of members on the National Voice and the link between the Local & Regional Voices and the National Voice.

As a result of the consultation and engagement process and resulting deliberations, key refinements are presented for the proposed National Voice.

The final proposal for the National Voice is for a small national body of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members tasked to advise the Australian Parliament and Government. The National Voice would provide the mechanism to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a direct say on any national laws, policies and programs affecting them.

The National Voice would provide advice to both the Australian Parliament and Government. This is important because it allows the National Voice to engage fully with laws and policies at different stages of development. This dual advice function reflects the different roles of Government and Parliament in making laws and policies. This does not diminish from the role of providing a voice to Parliament; it strengthens and integrates advice, ensuring early engagement before bills are introduced to Parliament. By providing for a voice to both Parliament and Government, the National Voice would engage fully with policy of different kinds and at different stages of development.

The National Voice would advise on matters of national significance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples relating to their social, spiritual and economic wellbeing. This is to ensure that the diverse perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are considered in key areas of legislation and policy development. The relationship between the Australian Parliament and Government and the National Voice would be a two-way interaction, with each able to initiate advice or commence discussion around relevant policy matters.

The proposed model for the National Voice includes a set of consultation standards for when, how and on what types of matters the Australian Parliament and/or Government should consult with the National Voice. Engagement with the National Voice would ideally occur early in the development of relevant laws and policies to allow for a partnership approach. The Australian Parliament and Government would be 'obliged' to ask the National Voice for advice on a defined and limited number of proposed laws and policies that overwhelmingly affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. There would also be an 'expectation' to consult the National Voice, based on a set of principles, on a wider group of policies and laws that significantly affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The proposed model for the National Voice also includes a set of complementary transparency mechanisms situated in the Parliament to provide for public accountability and enhance the ability of the National Voice to be heard. Importantly, these are based on existing parliamentary mechanisms and practices.

A key element of the consultation standards is the general expectation that Parliament and Government would engage the National Voice at the earliest opportunity when developing policies and proposed laws that have a significant impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The result of this early engagement would mean that by the time a bill is finalised, the National Voice should already have been engaged and given the opportunity to provide considered formal advice.

The consultation standards and transparency mechanisms must be flexible enough to address the full range of possible circumstances, particularly concerning timing. In some cases, consultation with the National Voice may be built in from the early stages. In other cases, legislative changes may be time-sensitive, and a shorter amount of time might be provided for consultation with the National Voice. The proposed consultation standards and transparency mechanisms do not take a prescriptive approach to this. Instead, they support partnership and dialogue that can facilitate change.

How membership of a National Voice is determined is a crucial matter for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. During community consultation sessions, a significant topic of discussion—especially in the most disadvantaged areas—was the need for greater representation at a national level to ensure the most marginalised and excluded voices have the opportunity to be heard, particularly those of people living in remote areas and those of people who are not members of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander organisation. As a result of this, and through careful deliberation, the final proposal for a National Voice is a 24-member model including 5 members representing remote regions, and one member representing the significant number of Torres Strait Islanders living on the mainland. This is a critical refinement from the proposal in the Interim Report that each state and the Northern Territory have 2 members, and the Australian Capital Territory and the Torres Strait Islands each have one or 2 members, for a maximum of 18 members. In both the interim and final proposals, there is also an option for the joint appointment of up to 2 additional members if a particular skill set is required and this is agreed upon between the National Voice members and the Minister for Indigenous Australians.

The National Voice membership would be structurally linked to Local & Regional Voices. Members of the Local & Regional Voices within each state and territory would collectively determine National Voice members from their respective jurisdictions. This membership model draws on the strength, legitimacy and authority of Local & Regional Voices, particularly as developed under the principles of Inclusive Participation and Cultural Leadership. This would embed community voices and ensure the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is connected to the National Voice. This membership model provides flexibility and opportunity for the involvement of jurisdiction-level Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representative assemblies, where they exist, and elections if the Local & Regional Voices and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of the relevant jurisdiction agree.

The final proposals for the National Voice and the deliberations of the National Co-design Group are further detailed in Chapter 2 of this report.

## **An Indigenous Voice as an integrated system**

While the final proposals include models for both Local & Regional Voices and a National Voice, the co-design groups recognised that an Indigenous Voice must be an integrated system in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' perspectives are appropriately heard at all levels. Consultation feedback demonstrated that local communities want their distinct voices heard by the Australian Parliament and Government, which confirmed the need for such an integrated approach. The present levels of exclusion from decisions made about, and the current absence of a coordinated and integrated mechanism for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to have a say as individuals, communities or organisations was also keenly felt throughout consultation.

The final proposals also provide a system-wide approach in which Local & Regional Voices and the National Voice complement and support each other to ensure the best outcomes. The design of the final proposals provides for this through both structurally linked membership and a two-way formal advice link between Local & Regional Voices and the National Voice.

## Working with existing bodies

In developing the proposals for Local & Regional Voices and the National Voice, the co-design groups considered the range of existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies and organisations at the local, national and international levels. The Interim Report noted the significant strengths present in many existing arrangements. Feedback from the consultation process, particularly submissions and community consultation sessions, suggested that an Indigenous Voice should not duplicate or usurp existing bodies. However, it also noted an absence of existing opportunity for all members of a community to be represented or participate and identified areas where existing arrangements could improve and evolve with the implementation of an Indigenous Voice.

The final proposals for Local & Regional Voices would see existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and individuals involved in their Local & Regional Voice arrangements. Each Local & Regional Voice would be a mechanism to bring together views from a range of local people and stakeholders within their region, including members of community-controlled organisations, service providers, business, advisory bodies, statutory bodies, educators and others whose participation in these arrangements is vital. State, territory and local government participation in Local & Regional Voices would be crucial, as would building on existing arrangements for shared decision-making. These intersections are detailed in Chapter 1 of this report.

It would also be essential that the National Voice engage with existing bodies and organisations when developing its advice to the Australian Parliament and Government. There has been some concern expressed that a National Voice might lead to overlap and differing views on matters being presented on a given topic. The view of the majority of members of the co-design groups is that the National Voice would be well placed to amplify and support the views of existing bodies. However, there may be times when views may differ given the extensive range and scope of consultations that will be undertaken by National and Local & Regional Voices.

It is essential to acknowledge the existing effective relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies and organisations and government, including the historic National Agreement on Closing the Gap (National Agreement) between the Coalition of Peaks and all Australian governments. Implementation of

an Indigenous Voice will complement existing arrangements such as the National Agreement, building on the strengths of what is in place.

The final proposals in this report underline the importance of relationships and highlight how an Indigenous Voice would work with existing structures, and also consult with people who are not members of any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to gain their perspective. As the Indigenous Voice arrangements mature, their alignment with existing arrangements would also evolve.

## Consultation and engagement

Stage two of the co-design process offered a unique opportunity for the Australian public to be a part of co-designing an Indigenous Voice. The consultation and engagement process sought to build an understanding of the co-design process and the proposals for both the Local & Regional Voices and a National Voice and seek feedback on how the proposals could work in practice and be improved.

More than 9,400 people and organisations participated in the consultation and engagement process, which ran over 4 months from 9 January 2021. People from across the country participated through community consultation sessions, submissions, surveys, webinars and stakeholder meetings, supported by a range of educational resources explaining the purpose of an Indigenous Voice and the proposals. The feedback from consultation was invaluable in testing the Interim Report proposals and directly influenced the design of the final proposals to the Australian Government detailed in this Final Report.

Alongside strong support for an Indigenous Voice, several key themes emerged from consultation and engagement. These themes included a sense of momentum and urgency and a need to move quickly; a desire for consultation and co-design to continue through implementation; validation of the core proposals put forward by the co-design groups; and calls for security and longevity for an Indigenous Voice. Notwithstanding that the purpose of the co-design process was to design the details of an Indigenous Voice, it is important to note that throughout the consultation and engagement phase, there was strong support for the enshrinement of the Indigenous Voice in the Australian Constitution.

The stage two consultation and engagement process is detailed in Chapter 3 of this report.



## Transition and implementation

The importance of effective implementation of the final proposals was emphasised by the co-design groups, including the need to act promptly to progress implementation while ensuring co-design processes with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue. A transition and implementation working group was formed to consider what steps would be necessary to support the implementation of the proposals and what this would entail.

2 options are put forward for progressing implementation. Both focus immediately on establishing Local & Regional Voices, with options on the timing for establishing a National Voice. One option is to establish the National Voice once the majority of Local & Regional Voices are in place, and another is to establish an interim body while Local & Regional Voices form.

These considerations are detailed in Chapter 4 of this report.

### Report summary

This Final Report builds on the proposals in the Indigenous Voice Co-design Process Interim Report to the Australian Government, available at [voice.niaa.gov.au](http://voice.niaa.gov.au)

The preliminary sections introduce this Final Report. They include the Foreword, Executive Summary and visual guides to the key elements of the final proposals.

Chapters 1 and 2 detail the proposals for a principles-based framework for Local & Regional Voices and a National Voice, respectively. These chapters explore how stage two feedback influenced the final proposals and explain the intersections the National Voice and Local & Regional Voices would have with each other and with a range of stakeholders and existing arrangements.

Chapter 3 details the stage two consultation and engagement process, including detailed statistical information and broad insights. This chapter also explains the process undertaken by the co-design groups to consider feedback and addresses additional themes that emerged from consultation and engagement.

Chapter 4 details a range of transition and implementation considerations, including the potential pathways to new arrangements, includes the Senior Advisory Group's reflections on the co-design process and deliberations and describes the recommendations.

## Recommendations

The Senior Advisory Group acted as a peer review group for the co-design groups throughout the process. The co-design groups worked iteratively, presenting emerging proposals to the Senior Advisory Group for testing and feedback. This process allowed for ideas and proposals to be contested, improved and resolved. Throughout this process, the Senior Advisory Group offered key observations and helped to build momentum and craft proposals that reflected and responded to the feedback of all Australians.

The Senior Advisory Group recommends that the Australian Government:

1. Progress an Indigenous Voice by implementing the Local & Regional Voices and National Voice proposals as set out in the Final Report.
2. Recognise the importance of involving all levels of government in Local & Regional Voices and seek to negotiate formal commitments as soon as practical. This will demonstrate the commitment of governments to working in partnership to deliver on the significant structural Indigenous Voice reform.
3. Recognise the importance of ensuring sustainability and security for an Indigenous Voice. This requires the provision of funding certainty and appropriate safeguards as part of any enabling legislation, including the establishment of the National Voice as a new independent Commonwealth entity.
4. Recognise the need to continue to work in partnership to progress implementation. This includes further conversations and co-design to ensure the effectiveness and legitimacy of the Indigenous Voice.
5. Recognise the need for a comprehensive communication strategy to support community understanding, ensure transparent and consistent messages and prepare for implementation.
6. Note the support for the enshrinement of the Indigenous Voice in the Constitution that was expressed particularly through the submissions received as part of the consultation process.
7. Release the Final Report to the public.

These recommendations and further reflections from the Senior Advisory Group are in Chapter 4 of this report.



## Conclusion

Throughout the consultation and engagement process, we noted a strong desire for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to have a voice, and this was also supported by the wider Australian community.

Hearing the advice and perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and listening to their views would see improved outcomes, more effective, productive and fairer laws, policies and programs. The final proposals for an Indigenous Voice would provide a coordinated, integrated, system-wide mechanism to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; such a mechanism does not currently exist.

The final proposals for an Indigenous Voice have brought together various views and perspectives through robust and rigorous co-design and consultation processes. If implemented, the final proposals outlined in this report would lay a solid foundation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to work in partnership with all levels of government and have a greater say in legislation, policies, programs and service delivery.

It is inevitable and imperative that an Indigenous Voice continues to evolve, as both local and regional and national arrangements take shape and mature. For now, we offer heartfelt thanks and respect to the many Australians who contributed their thoughts, hopes and ideas to the co-design process. They have been inspirational, invaluable and boosted our confidence to push forward on this journey.



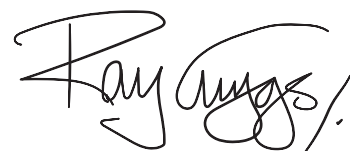
Professor Dr Marcia Langton AO  
Co-Chair, Senior Advisory Group



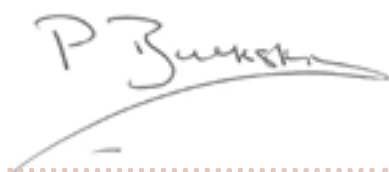
Professor Tom Calma AO  
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Dr Donna Odegaard AM  
Co-Chair, National Co-design Group



Mr Ray Griggs AO CSC  
Co-Chair, National Co-design Group



Professor Peter Buckskin PSM FACE  
Co-Chair, Local & Regional Co-design Group



Ms Letitia Hope  
Co-Chair, Local & Regional Co-design Group

# Principles-based framework for Local & Regional Voice

## What is the Local & Regional Indigenous Voice Framework?

### Purpose

To enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in every community to have a greater say in public policy, programs and service delivery affecting their lives through shared decision making in partnership with governments.

### How will it be achieved?

Regional governance structures are established as Local & Regional Voice, building on what exists and works well. There are ways for local communities across a region to lead on their local priorities and link up with region-wide work.

Local & Regional Voice works in partnership with all levels of government. They provide advice and engage in planning and 'shared decision making' on policies and programs affecting communities, based on community aspirations and priorities. Detail in Scope below.

### Context

The *Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition* found Local & Regional Voice should provide a forum for dialogue between Indigenous Australians and governments on policy, programs and services, and draw on the varying practices of communities rather than a 'one size fits all' model.

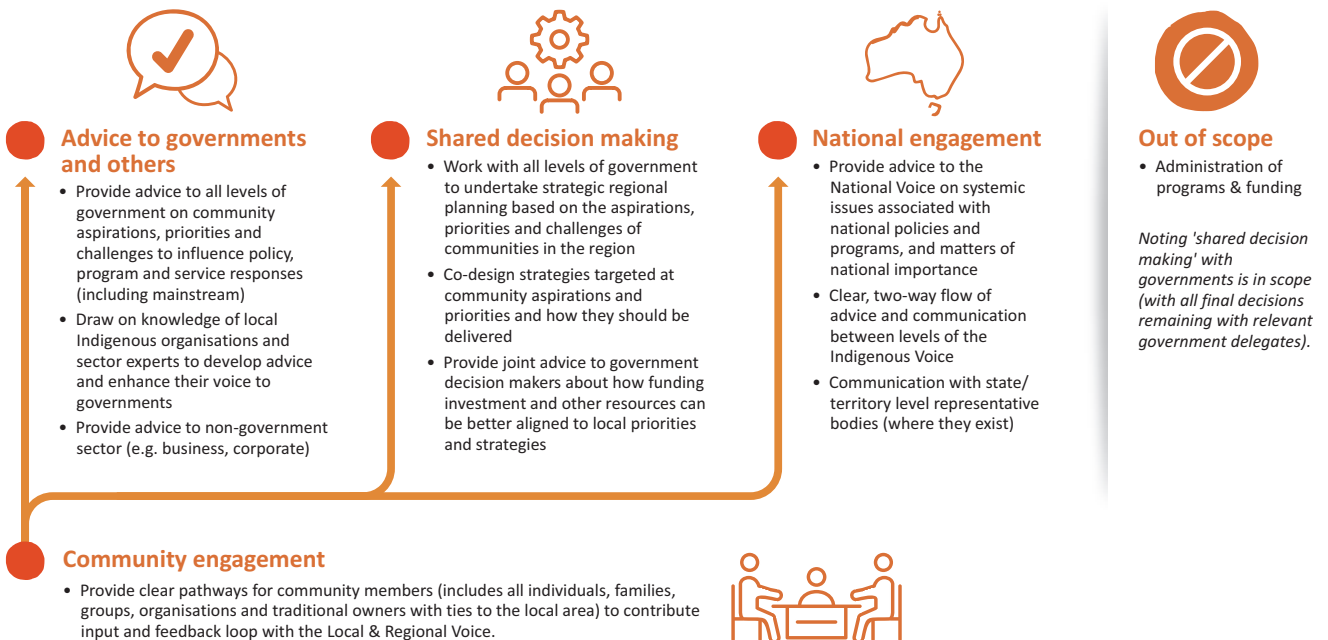
The Local & Regional Co-design Group's task is to articulate preferred approaches to improved local and regional decision making and Indigenous regional governance, and provide advice on preferred options.

To achieve this, the Group has developed this principles-based framework that:

- draws on what is working well in local and regional decision-making across the country
- is flexible enough to build on these approaches and accommodate diverse communities
- provides a platform for enhanced, effective and sustainable engagement between communities and governments on the ground
- connects communities and regions to a National Voice
- embeds respectful and culturally safe arrangements for all involved – community members and governments alike.

## Scope

Functions of Local & Regional Voice are expected to evolve over time along this spectrum, depending on their preferences and capacity.



## Principles

These guide Local & Regional Voice, government arrangements, and the partnership interface arrangements.

### ★ Empowerment

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have greater control and voice in their own affairs – a self-determination approach. Governments shift to an enabling role. Arrangements are culturally safe.

### ★ Inclusive Participation

- All have the opportunity to have a say, including traditional owners and historical residents. Arrangements are broad-based and support respectful engagement across a diversity of voices – individuals, communities and organisations. This includes 'unheard' community members that have been historically excluded, or who face unique barriers to participation.

### ★ Cultural Leadership

- Local & Regional Voice arrangements strongly connect to cultural leaders in a way that is appropriate for each community and region. Communities determine how this principle interacts with the Inclusive Participation principle in their context.

### ★ Community-led Design

- Arrangements are determined by communities according to local context, history and culture. Community ownership gives authorisation and mandate to Local & Regional Voices. Communities determine implementation pace; governments support and enable this.

### ★ Non-duplication and Links with Existing Bodies

- Local & Regional Voices build on and leverage existing approaches wherever possible, with adaptation and evolution as needed to improve the arrangements. Voices link to other existing bodies, not duplicate or undermine their roles.

### ★ Respectful Long-term Partnerships

- Governments and Local & Regional Voices commit to mutually respectful and enduring partnership, supported by structured interface. Governments are responsive and proactive. Governments support building capacity and expertise of Local & Regional Voices and implement system changes.

### ★ Transparency and Accountability

- Governments and Local & Regional Voices adhere to clear protocols and share responsibility and accountability, especially downwards to communities.

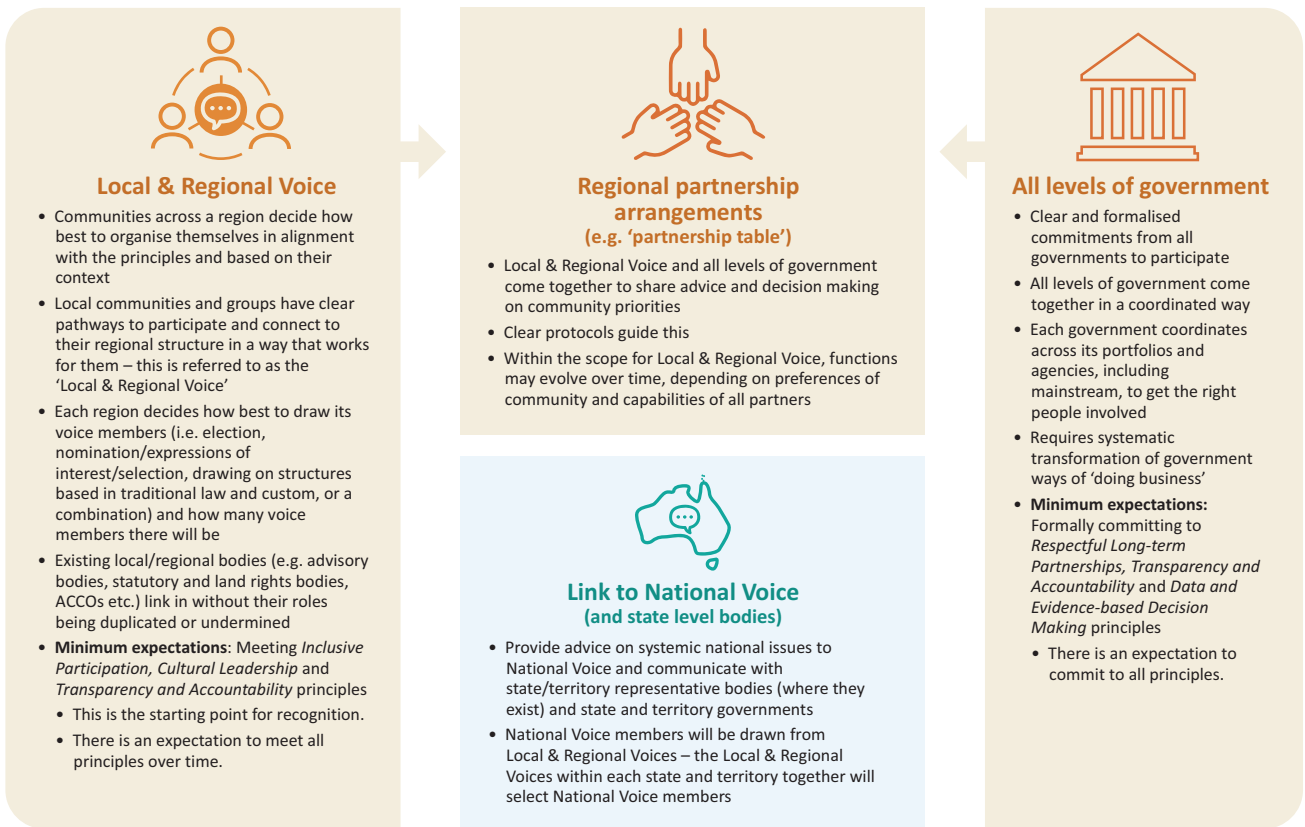
### ★ Capability Driven

- Local & Regional Voice arrangements match the unique capabilities and strengths of each community and region. Governments and communities both build their capability to work in partnership and support local leadership development.

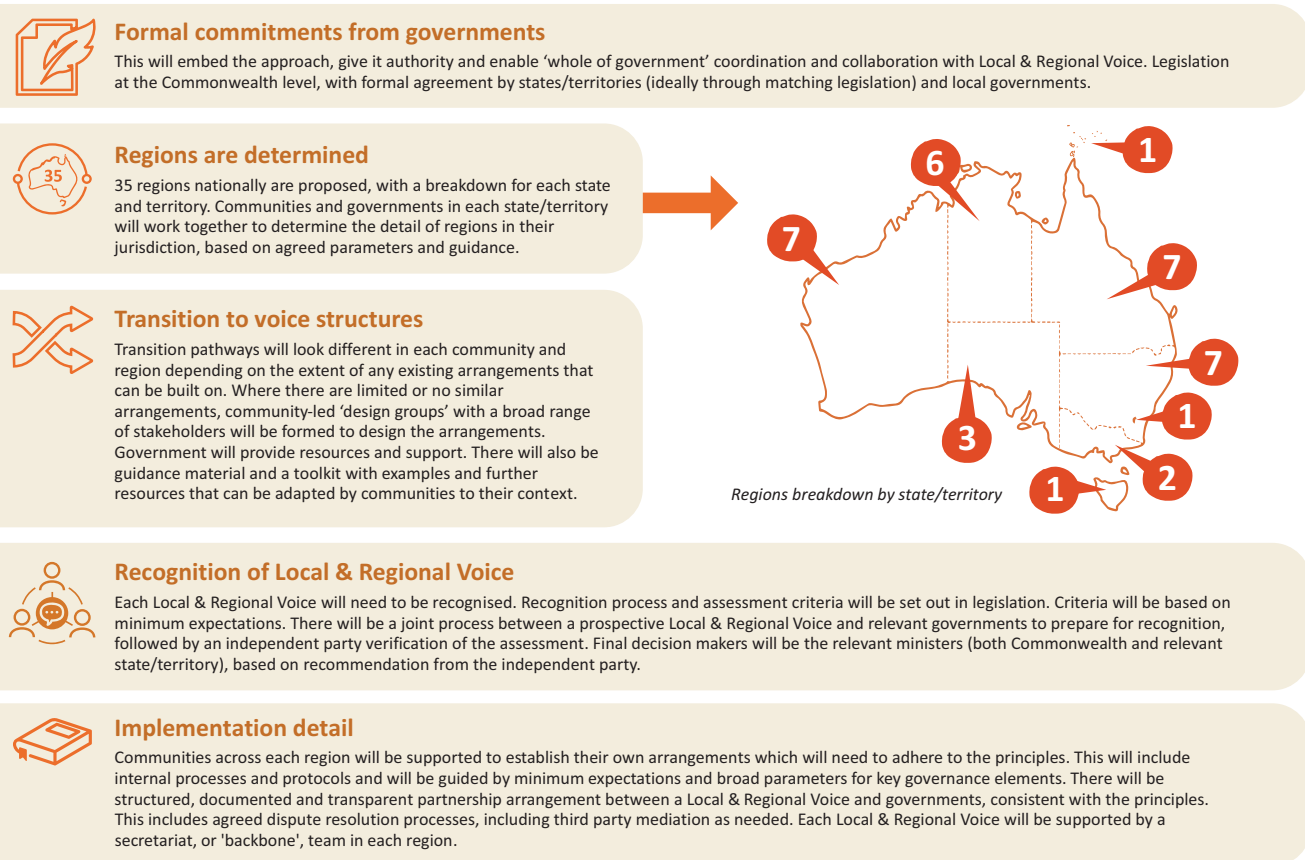
### ★ Data and Evidence-based Decision-Making

- Data is shared between governments and communities to enable evidence based advice and shared decision-making. Communities are supported to collect and manage their own data.

## How does this work in practice?



## What are the steps to get there?

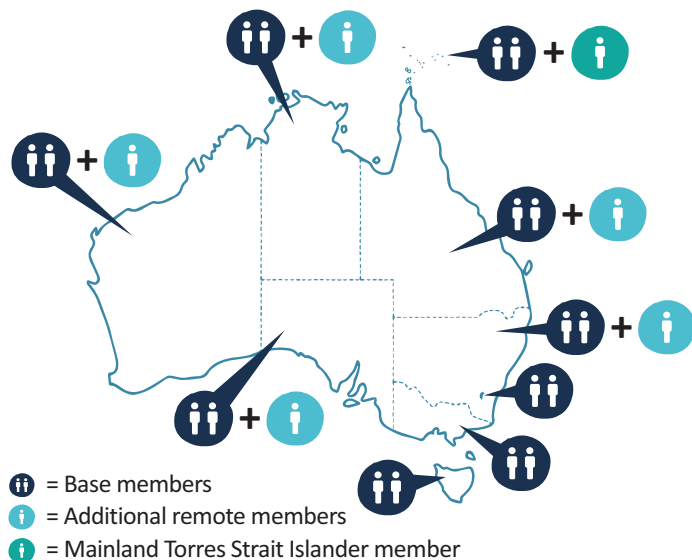




# National Voice overview

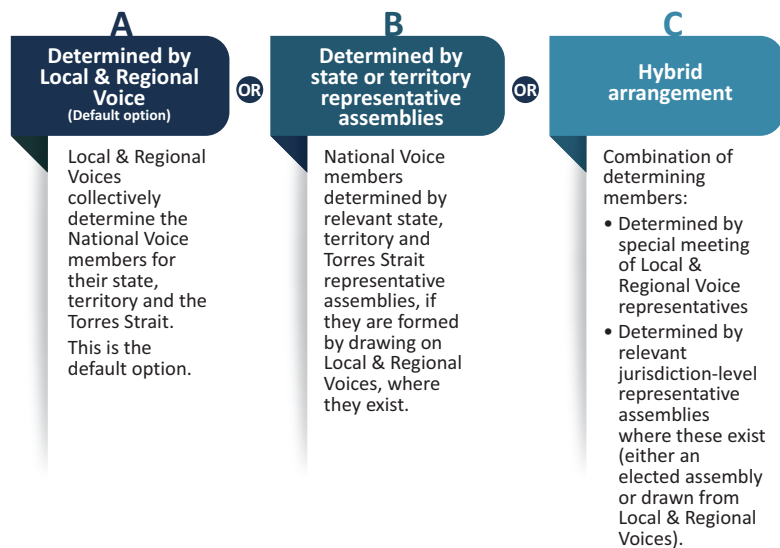
## Structure and membership

### 24 Members



- There would be two members from each state and territory, as well as the Torres Strait Islands.
- There would also be a third member for remote representation for NSW, NT, QLD, WA and SA and one member for mainland Torres Strait Islander people.
- Gender balance would be structurally guaranteed.
- Option for two additional members jointly appointed between the National Voice and the Government.

### Membership structurally linked to Local & Regional Voice



### Role of members

Members would represent the diverse perspectives of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at the national level. Part of the role is to represent the views of Local & Regional Voices in their state, territory or the Torres Strait Islands.

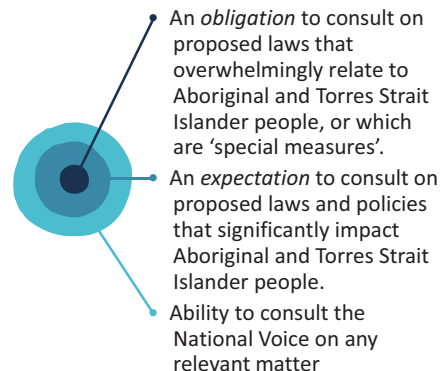
### Membership features

- Members would have four year staggered terms (maximum two consecutive terms).
- Members would select two full time co-chairs of different gender from among themselves.
- Members would be subject to eligibility requirements (age, Indigenous identity, criminal conviction and bankruptcy), and a fit and proper person assessment. Eligibility issues would be subject to review on the advice of an independent Ethics Council.
- A member could be removed from their position for misconduct, subject to a review process and a two-thirds super-majority vote of the membership.

## Parliament and Government

### Consultation standards

The proposed standards set out when and how the National Voice should be consulted by Parliament and Government including:



- Consultation should occur as early as possible in the development of relevant laws and policies, and throughout the development process.

### Transparency mechanisms

- A statement would be included with bills that would explain consultation with the National Voice.
- The National Voice would be able to table formal advice in Parliament.
- A parliamentary committee would consider tabled advice and engagement with the National Voice, and enable parliamentarians to hear directly from the National Voice.

All elements would be non-justiciable, meaning that there could not be a court challenge and no law could be invalidated based on whether there was alignment with the consultation standards or transparency mechanisms.

## Policy and expert input

Two permanent committees, separate to the membership:

- A Youth Permanent Advisory Group
- Disability Permanent Advisory Group

The National Voice would be able to establish other committees and draw on expert advice at any time.

## Corporate form

The National Voice would be a new, independent Commonwealth entity. The National Voice members would be supported by its own Office of the National Voice to provide policy and administrative support.

# Functions

## Role of the National Voice

On behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the National Voice would have a responsibility and right to advise the Parliament and Australian Government on national matters of significance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

### Core function

Advise on matters of national significance relating to the social, spiritual and economic wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



### Advice function scope

- Advice would be both proactive and responsive. The National Voice would be able to initiate advice, as well as respond to referrals from the Parliament and Australian Government.
- The National Voice would determine which issues to advise on. There would be no restriction on this. Advice would focus on national level issues.
- The National Voice would prioritise to focus resources on what it sees as most important.
- Advice would be provided to both the Parliament and the Australian Government.

### Advice function features

- Two-way interactions between the National Voice and the Parliament and Australian Government. The National Voice may ask for advice and information.
- Advice can be requested by the Parliament or Australian Government but the National Voice would not be required to provide advice.
- Advice would generally be public, with discretion for informal discussions where appropriate.
- Advice would present a clear position where possible, with flexibility to reflect diverse or dissenting views where necessary.

## Engagement with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations

The National Voice would engage and link with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. It would not replace or undermine existing bodies.

### Links



### The National Voice would not:

- ✗ deliver Government programs.
- ✗ provide mediation or facilitation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.
- ✗ replace existing organisations.
- ✗ be an escalation point for local and regional operational issues, nor mediate between government and Local & Regional Voices.
- ✗ be a clearing house for research.
- ✗ undertake program evaluation, but could identify matters where evaluation may be needed, or how evaluations could be more effective.