



BCG

BCG Submission on an Indigenous Voice

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Introduction

BCG is pleased to be able to give feedback on the Indigenous Voice Discussion Paper with a view both to furthering the national interest and furthering the outcomes of Indigenous Australians in all the many diverse regions of Australia.

Our feedback is based on our long-time, mostly pro bono, in-the-field work both locally and regionally with Indigenous leaders and communities; on our deep experience with how State and Commonwealth Government works; and on our deep experience with change management and delivery with corporate and not-for-profit Australia.

Background to BCG's involvement with Indigenous Australia

Boston Consulting Group (BCG) has been supporting Indigenous leaders and communities pro bono across Australia for almost twenty years now. We have supported Indigenous leaders and their communities on all forms of economic and social development, including their interactions with governments (given that, on average, governments are far more intertwined with Indigenous Australians than they are with non-Indigenous Australians).

Over time we have supported leaders and community organisations in many regions of Australia:

- South West WA and the Kimberley, WA
- Arnhem Land, NT
- LaPerouse and Redfern, NSW
- Greater Shepparton and Geelong areas, Victoria
- Cape York, Queensland

We have supported those leaders and communities on many topics:

- Development of Indigenous businesses, employment and wealth creation
- Management of alcohol in Indigenous communities, and child protection
- Health, housing and education services better tailored to improved Indigenous outcomes
- Skill building of Indigenous leaders and empowered governance of Indigenous communities and organisations, current and future
- Establishment or strategic support of civil society organisations that aim to enable Indigenous development, such as Jawun and Aurora Education

BCG also works with and advises corporate, government and not-for-profit Australia on some of their most complex challenges.

Feedback on the Indigenous Voice proposals - General

1. We are **highly supportive** of the Indigenous Voice proposals.
2. We would suggest that **time is of the essence** in moving to actually establish local and regional and national 'voices' as the absence of such voices hampers on the ground progress in communities and regions, and makes consultation and input on significant national issues slow and cumbersome.
3. We believe a National Voice, with the form to be determined by Parliament through legislation, should be **required by the Constitution** as part of the recognition of Indigenous Australians in the constituting document of modern Australia.

Feedback on the Indigenous Voice proposals - Local and Regional

4. By way of **feedback on the Local and Regional issues you raised** we would offer the following:
 - 4.1. Establishing local and regional ‘voices’, tailored to the unique circumstances of each place, would make engaging with Indigenous Australia far easier for non-Indigenous Australia, but also provide a ‘platform’ for Indigenous capability building over time, for the cumulative benefit of all;
 - 4.2. The local and regional voice principles are excellent;
 - 4.3. The framework, in its local tailoring, allows for bespoke but solid arrangements between local, State and Commonwealth government and Indigenous communities, and avoid the constant ‘reinvention of the wheel’ that slows down all decision-making and outcomes, notwithstanding the good intentions of individuals involved.
 - 4.4. In general, fewer larger regions would seem to make governance easier, unless there is a good Indigenous-led reason for more smaller regions;
 - 4.5. To support the establishment of local and regional voices there will need to be:
 - 4.5.1. Capability building of the individuals and institutions involved, just as corporates have done with non-executive directors over years.
 - 4.5.2. A capability/merit-based Secretariat for the individuals on the ‘voices’, just as any ASX, corporate or major not-for-profit board has support structures and people to enable it to give wise counsel.
 - 4.5.3. Commonwealth Government and State Governments changing the way they deal with ‘place’ both in the public service structures and decision making cultures, with more corporate-like devolved decision making organised around ‘customer segments’ rather than ‘government products and services’. Commonwealth and State Government will also need to change the way they work with each other in relation to a place, especially in relation to aligned decision-making processes that enable faster localised decisions.
 - 4.5.4. A change in government away from a heavy ‘inputs and outputs’ focus for itself, to more of a corporate-like focus on achieving outcomes, with real incentives for ‘achieving outcomes by enabling Indigenous Australians’.
5. By way of **feedback on other aspects of the Local and Regional ‘voice’** we would offer the following:
 - 5.1. The ‘Local and Regional Indigenous Voice Framework’ makes no mention of achieving outcomes as the ‘end result’. The purpose is not just the giving of input, but the giving of input with a view to achieving improved outcomes for Indigenous Australia and the national interest. This could be explicitly stated.
 - 5.2. State and Territory Governments will be absolutely critical to making this work, yet there is less said about them. Their role in enabling and working with the local and regional voices should be called out more explicitly.

Feedback on the Indigenous Voice proposals - National

6. By way of **feedback on the National Voice** we would offer the following:
 - 6.1. A National voice is essential to advance the national interest and bring together the diversity of local and regional voices into a structured whole that government and broader civil society can engage with.
 - 6.2. As mostly non-Indigenous observers we do not presume to be authoritative on the question of membership, but would suggest the first membership structure, drawn directly from the Local and Regional Voices, may be the most sustainable with its aspects of (i) local and regional

endorsement (ii) earned effort at a local and regional level as an implicit criterion (among many) for involvement in a national voice.

- 6.3. Again as observers, we would suggest that four year terms are more conducive to achieving real outcomes, with staggering to maintain continuity of experience. Forming the body as a Commonwealth body would appear to give it a more sound institutional base, as well as the endorsement of the Parliament.
- 6.4. To support the establishment of a National voice there will need to be:
 - 6.4.1. Further capability building of the individuals and institutions involved, just as corporates have done with non-executive directors over years.
 - 6.4.2. A capability/merit-based Secretariat for the individuals on the voice, just as any ASX, corporate or major not-for-profit board has support structures and people to enable it to give wise counsel.
 - 6.4.3. Meaningful resourcing of the connection between the National Voice and the Regional and Local Voices so that input and dialogue can be enabled, just as a corporate joint-venture and its constituent ‘venturers’ enable the dialogue between the joint-venture board members and the constituent joint venture organisations and their directors and executives.
 - 6.4.4. A change in government away from a heavy ‘inputs and outputs’ focus for itself, to more of a corporate-like focus on achieving outcomes.

Constituting a National Indigenous Voice

7. We believe a National Voice, with the form to be determined by Parliament through legislation, should be **required by the Constitution** as part of the recognition of Indigenous Australians in the constituting document of modern Australia.
 - 7.1. If we are serious as a nation about establishing a voice from the Indigenous inhabitants of this country to the Executive and the Parliament, we should declare that establishment within the constituting document of the Commonwealth. However, as with many provisions of the Constitution, the form of the voice would be determined by the Parliament through legislation, presumably subsequent to the sort of co-design that is currently being engaged in.
 - 7.2. To do otherwise than declare the voice in the Constitution is tantamount to saying we imagine a time when there should *not* be an Indigenous voice to the Commonwealth Executive and Parliament, no matter how small, notwithstanding 60,000 years of Indigenous history in Australia as the oldest continuing living culture on Earth.
 - 7.3. Such a small enabling provision, while leaving the form of the voice to the Parliament, does acknowledge in our constituting document that Indigenous Australians have been here since time immemorial, and ought to make some contribution in to certain deliberations of those elected to represent each of the Commonwealth’s upper and lower House electorates.

Implementation

Detailed design and implementation will require major effort and tailored adaptive and ongoing support of Indigenous leaders in each local area and region of Australia. It will also require a positive change in the way government at all levels engages with Indigenous Australia and its voices, but that will be for the better in achieving real and improved outcomes in each place relative to our slow progress as States, Territories and as a nation to date.