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TRANSCRIPT OF EVENT

INDIGENOUS VOICE WEBINAR

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TOM CALMA AO: Good afternoon or good morning to all who were on online for this event. Can I acknowledge that IPAA is hosting this event and it's coming to you virtually across the nation to talk about the indigenous voice and where at. My co-host is Letitia Hope. And I'll get Letitia to introduce herself a little bit later, but we've got over 400 registrations across the nation to participate in this webinar. And whilst there's a good number from Canberra, they're all over. And some are Commonwealth, public servants, others from the private sector, the local governments represented as well as state and territory governments. So it's a great cross section and there are a number of university members online as well. So can I begin by acknowledging that we here in Canberra are on none of all country and pay respects to the Ngunnawal country of all Elders and all the regional tribal groups around Canberra who participated including the Ngambri and also the Warragul people.

We acknowledge their Elders past and present, and we acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from across the nation across the lands and the waters that are never ceded by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We also want to recognise our youths because youth are going to be our future leaders, the custodians of our stories, our cultures, our histories, and our languages. And it's very fitting to actually talk about that now, because what we're talking about through this exercise of developing a voice to parliament is really about the future and how things will develop into the future and the role that youth will have if not today, but into the future, because this is what's going to be there's.

We've got an action packed one hour only. And as part of that, we've also got a number of videos that will hopefully help clarify a little bit or about elements of the voice and the consultations. My name is Tom Calma, I'm Kungarakana on my mother's side and Iwaidja my father's side, coming from Darwin and just outside of Darwin. I'm also, co-chair with Professor Marcia Langton of the Senior Advisory Group to the Voice to Parliament exercise. And we'll talk about that a little bit more, but my co-host is Letitia Hope, over to you Letitia, and tell us about yourself.

LETITIA HOPE: Thanks very much, Tom, and good afternoon, everyone. So my name is Letitia Hope. I'm a Bundjalung woman with kin ties to the Torres Strait Islands. I'm currently one of the deputy CEOs at the National Indigenous Australians Agency. Before I go any further, I'd like to join my acknowledgement of country with Tom and pay respects to Elders past, present and emerging. Of course, across all the nations that are viewing today. So today we're here to talk about Voice and we thought we might start with what's happening in terms of the up and coming consultations. So we are currently out for consultation and this week we have a face-to-face consultations in Canberra, Mildura, Narooma, and Bairnsdale.

We really encourage people in those areas or who are traveling to those areas to register via voice.niaa.gov.au, get along. And of course, individuals can complete surveys or provide submissions, we're going to talk about why we're consulting and what we're consulting on. But I guess my very first important message is that we really want people to engage with this material and put their voice to the table, consider the proposals, consider all the options and put their views and perspectives. But before we dive too much further in, we might just go to a video from Tom and Marcia that introduces the voice.

TOM CALMA AO: The Voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been a part of this land for over 65,000 years. And yet in Australia's recent history our voices haven't always been heard when it comes to the creation of laws, policies, and services that impact our lives.

- MARCIA LANGTON AO: In 2017, the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* reaffirmed the need for a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representative body. A body that would serve as a voice to Parliament and Government.
- TOM CALMA AO: A voice to Parliament and Government is important. It provides a way for our representatives to give advice to Government on things that matter to us and affect us.
- MARCIA LANGTON AO: It gives people from our communities a stronger way to have their say.
- TOM CALMA AO: Over the last year, three groups made up of mostly Aboriginal people...
- MARCIA LANGTON AO: Have worked with Government to develop proposals on how an Indigenous Voice can best work in Australia.
- TOM CALMA AO: The Indigenous Voice would be a way for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians to share our views with the Parliament and the Government, and to work in partnership.
- MARCIA LANGTON AO: To have our voices heard on matters, that impact us and to make decisions and improve local services and outcomes together.
- TOM CALMA AO: The proposed Indigenous Voice is made of two important parts that we work together, the Local and Regional Voice and the National Voice.
- MARCIA LANGTON AO: A Local and Regional Voice would be a community designed and led governance structure. They would work in partnership with all levels of Government providing advice on the design and delivery of programs, policies, and services for the region. Local and Regional Voices would be guided by a flexible, principles based framework. This would allow for different structures in different regions. It would respond to the diverse circumstances, sustaining arrangements that work well.
- TOM CALMA AO: The National Voice would be a national advisory body made up of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We are asking you to consider how a membership to the body could work.
- MARCIA LANGTON AO: The National Voice would provide advice to the Parliament and Australian Government on laws, policies, and programs.
- TOM CALMA AO: It will be involved early and throughout the development processes, ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people perspectives are considered before decisions are made. It's now up to you, we want to hear your feedback on how the proposals would best work for you and for your community.
- MARCIA LANGTON AO: An Indigenous Voice is a step towards lasting change for our future and for the future of our young people. Make sure to have your site and have your voice heard.
- TOM CALMA AO: Okay. I hope you got as much out of that to give you a really good feel of about how the Voice may be able to operate into the future and what some of our aspirations are. What I thought I'd do is very quickly give you a snapshot of how we got to where we are today and what sort of bodies have influenced where we're at. I think the first thing is that from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait a perspective since the date of colonisation, we've been advocating to be part of our own future. And there's been numerous bodies that have been established over the years to try and impact and influence on matters that affect us.

And in the report that you'll see there's a lot of probably 20 pages devoted to looking at the past.

And there's also a whole range of issues or pages divided to looking at current structures, but we'll go into that a little bit more. So Australia is on a reconciliation journey and we've also commenced probably only five or six years ago to earnestly look at what a co-design process or what co-design is all about. And I guess what we've got to look at is that in 2017, we had the referendum council and that was followed by the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* group. In 2018, there was a Joint Select Committee of Parliament established to look at what the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* was proposing as well as other submissions that people had provided. And I guess they came up with only four recommendations out of that process and I'll touch on them in a moment.

But the other key date is in 2019, it was a governance election commitment to administer Recommendation One and Recommendation Two of the Joint Select Committee. And they actually committed funding to both processes. So recommendation one of the joint select committee which this process is all about, was about the government establishing a co-design process to develop up a number of options to be considered by government on how a Voice to Parliament may be structured. And the key thing in that is that it had to be co-design with the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as well as government and also had to be done within this current term of Parliament. There was a recommendation, the Government's gone ahead and taken that on board.

Recommendation Two, and it's very important this one, is that on receiving the final report, the government would then consider how it might be implemented and it could be done through a legislative process, a referendum or another means it could be the establishment of a commission, it could be established as a company limited by guarantee or any number of other options. So that is a process that the government will take on after they receive our final report. And I think that's an important bit that we have to remember, but the whole purpose is that this is a new structure at the moment as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, we don't have the opportunity to have an input in policies and programs that impact on us. And we're often and too often blamed for failures in indigenous affairs when we had nothing to do with the construction of the legislation or the policies of the programs. So this process we hope will address it.

LETITIA HOPE:

Thanks Tom. So just so people can understand the process that we went through in terms of developing the interim report. So the minister engaged three co-design groups. So there was the Senior Advisory Group, which of course Tom and Marcia Langton with co-chairs of, there was a group designed for National Voice, which Ray Griggs, the CEO of the NIAA and Donna Odegaard were co-chairs and of course, Local Regional Voice, which myself and Peter Buckskin co-chaired. So these groups comprised of about 52 members from around the country, mostly indigenous, but not all Indigenous Australians, who came from a range of different not only countries and mobs, but sectorial expertise and expertise across indigenous affairs and more broadly community and business sector to come together. We started meetings in our deliberations I think just before the pandemic started in early February and over the last 12 months the group met around 70 times.

Not only were there 17 meetings, there were subgroups that kind of met together to discuss various issues that would link national and local and regional nodal, and kind of talk about how that would work. The group drafted the interim report and presented that to government. And of course the Minister, Minister Wyatt, released that in full and unchanged on the 9th of January this year. So we were up to with the report, and as I said a little bit earlier, it's out for full consultation, it canvases a range of options across National and a range of options across Local Regional Voice, and these consultation processes and community, all Australians feeding back into this process are actually fundamental to what will be the design of the final report a bit later on in the year. And it's really important as we said earlier, that people get involved and engage with this material and bring their voice to the table.

TOM CALMA AO:

Yeah, I agree. And I think the other important bit was that as part of the process, it was also a senior officials group that sat beside and they were the senior officials from every state and territory government, as well as the local government association were represented. And whilst they didn't have an influence over what was in the report, they did provide some advice, but it was really about them hearing what was being proposed and not vetting, but letting us know if there were any issues that needed to be resolved. And I guess the whole notion of co-design is really an important one that we're all across the nation sort of coming to grips with it.

And that's how our government can work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, or any interest groups in fact, and so that instead of being a top-down process Co-design is about a bottom up and an agreement where people can work together. And so that we can get the better outcomes there may be more efficient and they might be more effective, but as affected peoples, we're always in a position to say what from your experience might or might not work. So as you said, Letitia, there were two elements to the co-design process. One was the Local and Regional and the other was the National body. So let's have a look at another video and see what the Local and Regional co-design structure was about. And what's being proposed.

VOICEOVER:

A Local and Regional Voice would be a governance structure at the regional level. It would be designed and led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities in each region. This will be guided by the proposed principles based framework. Each Local and Regional Voice would provide advice to all levels of government. This includes the Australian Government state or territory governments and local governments. Advice from a Local and Regional Voice would be on what's important to communities across its region. Local and Regional Voices could also work in partnership with all levels of government on how to improve local services and deliver on community priorities. This approach is sometimes referred to as shared decision-making. A key role for each Local and Regional Voice would be ongoing engagement with local communities, groups, organisations, and other stakeholders across their region.

This will ensure its work reflects the views, priorities and aspirations of local people. Local and Regional Voices would also provide advice to the National Voice on national issues. They would not manage government programs or funding, nor replace or undermine existing bodies. No one set structure is proposed for Local and Regional Voices. Different regions could design different Local and Regional Voice governance structures depending on what works best for them guided by the framework. Traditional owners living on country, as well as all other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents in a region would be able to be involved.

LETITIA HOPE:

So, Tom, well, just to pull out some of the really key points in terms of that video, some of the major elements of the Local Regional Voices that it does need to be evolved from community from place. So there will be difference in regions. It's really important to understand that. And each regions may have different structures depending on what works best in that particular community. And that's really important to recognise the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia across the country. There's a principle based approach framework that the Co-design Group developed.

We did look very heavily at whether there were hard structures or options that could be put in place in terms of models. But because of the diversity, we kind of went a principle-based structure is way more achievable to harness a universality out of what we're doing with Local Regional Voice. There's nine principles within the structure, within the principle-based framework and those principles include empowerment, inclusive participation, cultural leadership, community led design, long-term partnership, accountability, capability driving, or capability building, data and evidence-based decision-making and of course, no duplication. So over that principle based approach, some of the other conversations that the local and regional Co-design Group had was around, well, how many regions, what does that look like? And so they did quite a lot of work on looking at, is it 11 regions in the way that the NIAA is structured? Is it 50 regions in the way would that be better?

And it really, after lots of debate decided the right amount of space was probably somewhere between 25 and 35 regions. Of course, that's yet to be determined depending on what those regional footprints look like from a community perspective and how they will help determine what that final number looks like, and where the boundaries of those regions are. And so it's really important that we kind of left that community based design element within the local and regional options. But also the biggest issue here is again, not duplicating. So it was about creating flexibility or enough flexibility within the framework or within structures to ensure that existing structures would be a starting point. We acknowledge that there are some communities have really mature levels of governance in the bureaucratic and system way, others don't and we wanted to build on and leverage those. So the community led design element of the Local Regional Voice is probably the fundamental thing that underpins it.

TOM CALMA AO:

Yeah, look, and I don't think it is important to recognise that a lot of activity happens at the both state and territory level, as well as at the local government level. And we worked on the principle that if we're going to have a National Voice, how do we get the voice of people from the grassroots coming up? And so you have to have an intermediate body and that's the local and regional, and that would feed into the national. So that was an important consideration by the Local and Regional groups and remembering that the membership of all the Co-design groups were people with a lot of experience, I didn't come in representing their organisation, they came in as independent parties who've got a lot of experience who could talk about these issues and what would work and what wouldn't work or might work and how we needed to change to be able to make a difference.

So I think that was really an important one to think about. But it is still does have its challenges because whilst this effort so far has been a Commonwealth driven effort and that we've had mentioned on the senior officials group that people observed it. We still have to get formal sign-off by the state and territory jurisdictions and their highest level. But I think we can have some confidence that this is likely to happen because through that process being of developing the closing the gap targets we've also seen the National Cabinet are working a lot more collegiately now on these processes, as well as the national agreement that's being established with the Coalition of Peaks, so on closing the gap. So there's impart there, but what we also we're really mindful of is that not every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person across the nation is a member of an Aboriginal organisation or big body or whatever.

So there's a lot of voices out there of individuals. And so we've got to come up with some sort of mechanisms to look at how do we engage with those people, so they can have a meaningful input. But I guess overall the couple of the key things out of it, you mentioned it, but really clearly we were very strong that the local and regional group, as well as the national group would not administer programs or funding and are very clear. And so it's a policy advisory coordination, advocacy sort of level, and not get down to the program funding, but also not to usurp or undermine or diminish the role of existing parties out there. But we also know that across the nation they vary, some States are very advanced in the way that they're structured.

And we look at in the ACT here, we've got an elected body and they are part of an advisory body to the ACT government and seems to be working quite effectively. That was one sort of model we looked at. We looked at the Torres Strait Regional Authority, which is another one, which works with both state and local government, as well as the Commonwealth and looks at both national and international activities around there. So we've got these mature bodies and in every state and territory, there's probably an element of some emerging relationship including the emerging communities that are out there. But we had to try and pull it all together, I guess. And so that's where we'd come up with what we in the video. So maybe you think there's any questions? Yeah, we do have some questions and if anybody does have, we've probably had a good time for a couple of questions, and I believe that... Letitia, did you see them?

LETITIA HOPE: Not yet, just waiting for them to come through.

TOM CALMA AO: Yeah they are coming through, yeah.

LETITIA HOPE: So I think the other one while we're just waiting for that. I think the other thing to say in terms of the Co-design Groups that developed the interim report, even in with of themselves, they were really contested conversations. They were really well debated, well contestant ideas, where the Co-design members had brought all of their experience to bear, to kind of really kick models around and challenge models around. And from there lived and learned experience, as well as their professional and sectorial experience to bring that to the table.

TOM CALMA AO: And we also practice what we're proposing in the report to try and have gender equality across all the groups and fair representation of both male and females on the group, but also people from the remote communities in Australia to the urban base. Yeah, so the whole lot of being pulled together, but for those who work in this in sector you know how challenging it can be.

LETITIA HOPE: I'm just conscious of time. And since we're just getting some questions across from folks, why don't we go to the national video, which is actually the other part of this story, really important to kind of understand that part.

TOM CALMA AO: Yeah, Okay. Good one.

VOICEOVER: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people would choose the members of the National Voice, all States and the Northern territory would be represented by two National Voice members. The ACT would be represented by one or two members. The Torres Strait Islands would also be represented by one or two members. There would be instances where the members from the Torres Strait Islands represent the views of all Torres Strait Islanders, including those living on the mainland. This would occur for matters of national significance to Torres Strait Islanders. There are two ways members could be chosen, model one is by choosing members from Local and Regional Voices, model two is by choosing members through an election process. Under both models, there would be gender balance among members. Under both models there is also an option for a state or territory representative body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to select National Voice members, if one exists.

The National Voice could have up to 20 members. This could include two appointed members to fill gaps where needed, but only where the National Voice members and Minister agree. For example, appointees could be used to ensure a mix of urban regional and remote members. Membership would be open to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. There could be an Ethics Council to provide advice to the National Voice on governance matters and ongoing integrity. 50% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are under 25 years of age, and 25% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live with a disability. Permanent Youth and Disability Advisory Groups would ensure those perspectives are captured by the National Voice.

VOICEOVER: The proposed National Voice would be an advisory body to both the Australian Parliament and the Australian Government. It could provide advice on national matters it decides other most important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. These matters would be prioritized by the National Voice. They would be on nationally significant matters of critical importance to the social, spiritual, and economic wellbeing of all, which has a significant or particular impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The National Voice could be engaged from the early stages of the development of relevant laws and policies. It could provide both formal and informal advice. Parliament and the Government would be required to ask the National Voice for advice on laws and policies, which only impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. They would be expected to ask the National Voice for advice on laws and policies that have a big impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

When a law is introduced to Parliament, it would be made clear if the National Voice has been asked for advice, if advice was provided and what the advice is, the National Voice would add to what exists already. This means it would work with and talk to existing structures, not replace them. The National Voice would also connect with Local and Regional Voices, ensuring it reaches into local communities. This would be a two way relationship. The National Voice would seek community input through local and voices. These elements support the role of the National Voice to have the right and responsibility on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians to advise Parliament and the government on national issues that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

TOM CALMA AO:

Okay. So that's again a highlight of what the National Voice will look like. And again, the reminder that website that link has got all these videos. So you can look at them in your own time, but you might've picked up in the video, but this one and the previous feeding guys is that we haven't been prescriptive. And that's been challenged as why we weren't. But the whole issue is that we want the people of Australia to provide some advice on what might or might not work in their communities. So if we think about it, we've got at the Local and Regional level looking at state issues and local issues taking them up to the state government, but also the Commonwealth government or the territory government and where it is applicable with the Local and Regional.

And then we have the voice which is at the national level. And so what was being proposed is that there'd be two people nominated from each of the jurisdictions. And then it said one from the ACT or two or one or two from the Torres Strait. But from already what we're seeing is that, it's likely to run down at two. And so that we're got national coverage and there's also provision for the minister in conjunction with the Voice group to a point to other people, maximum of two other people, cannot be unilaterally appointed by either party, it's got to be a joint decision to fill in any gaps that might exist. And those gaps could be that we don't have enough of the Elders represented in the group, or we might have other interest groups that that should be representative that aren't.

So there's a little bit of flexibility there. And so the next question is, well, how do you determine who gets appointed to the National Voice? What we're proposing is two models really, one is that it could be that each jurisdiction would nominate two people as long as one's a male and one's a female. And they could do that by collectively making a decision. And in some jurisdictions that might be easier than others. We've also heard from parties that that might not work in their jurisdiction, so we've proposed that there's an election process can take place where everybody who is interested, puts a name in the hat and it's drawn out through a public election process and there could be a hybrid. So we're not proposing that it's either direct appointment or election. We're saying that it could be either or as long as we get the ID and members up there at the national level, and that they would become the Voice.

And I think that's the flexibility, but it is a process that we really seeking advice through submissions or through the consultation. So for people to give us feedback. And I should remind there was initially submissions were closing on the 30th of this month, but they've been extended now for another month till the 30th of April because we've had a phenomenal number of submissions received so far, and also a number of requests saying, we haven't got our submission in yet. But can I also just remind people that our submission does not have to be a great process, it can be just a number of dot points, it could be looking at one issue only as long as if you're passionate about it. Let us know and we'll make sure that that's considered and that we will fairly represent the interest in the final report of what's in the submissions. But yeah, the decision at the end of the day has got to be with government as to what form it'll take, but from our side, we'll present it that way.

So some of the other issues that's been an interesting, and when in this whole process has been we're still got the legacy of the argument that it is a third chamber of Parliament and we want to really make it clear that this is an advisory body. We have to recognise that the parliament of Australia has sovereignty over decisions for the nation, and nobody can influence that or change the mind of a parliamentary decision. So it's not a third chamber, very clearly it is an advice mechanism to government it's going to require a whole range of I guess relationship building exercises over time to make sure that that voice is going to be heard. We are proposing that that's the Voice, both to the parliament and to the government, and that's an important distinction.

The parliament, when it comes down to matters of legislation or key issues that need to be debated at that level, but government more so because government controls the every day activities in indigenous affairs and also has influence over bureaucracy and we're funding goes. So that's important to have both of those levels of our government involved in the process. So it's important for those who are in bureaucracy, the government, you understand that process may be a little bit more than others. But what we are really keen on ensuring that people recognise that it is a process has kind of evolve, it's a process of relationship building, it's an advisory body, it's an opportunity to have an impact or have at least express a view about proposed legislations and also about major matters that impact on us as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, instead of being the passive recipients of government largest or policy development we need to be in the front seat, the box seat, the driving seat, and trying to influence it.

Easier said than done. And that's what we're going to develop, but I think, for us transparency and Letitia mentioned, one of the principles was about transparency. We needed to be very transparent, and we've seen that emerging over the whole process since 2008, with the Closing the Gap and the reporting to Parliament. So that sort of arrangement needs to take place. There are in the reports some structural issues where and just very quickly what we could be establishing if governments and the Parliament is willing is a Parliamentary Committee on Indigenous Affairs, similar to what we have with the Bill Scrutiny Committee with the Human Rights Committees of Parliament. So that any legislation that impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people would go through a Parliamentary Sitting Committee on Indigenous Affairs.

And so it needs to be ticked off and we propose it in the report. So we'd be very keen to hear what people might think about that particularly, and you might've seen the mention or a dimension of an ethics council. And I think the current, how can we describe it, shenanigans that are happening, but it's much more serious and the shenanigans but what's happening in the Parliament, not only just to restrict it to the Commonwealth Parliament, but other bodies around the nation where they would really benefit by having an external party that can help guide them and make sure that their practices are ethical and that they're in the best behavior. So we propose it, we actually propose that and I started to work very effectively with the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples. And it's really for those from the legal background, understanding about the role of amicus curiae in court cases, it's a Friend of the Parliaments, or it will be a Friend of the Courts or a Friend of Parliaments just to help them along their way.

LETITIA HOPE:

So, Tom, just on that, because the technology has started working. So there's a bunch of questions here. So I might go to the National ones and then we'll go back to the Local ones. So one of the questions from our viewers today is if advice from the National Voice is not taken up, would Parliament, Government have to give a reason why it's the first part of the question? The second part is what criteria is being used for people for the National Voice, and do you need qualifications?

TOM CALMA AO: Okay, well, the first part is you'll see in the report. We've suggested that if this Parliamentary Committee is established on Indigenous Affairs it should be utilised. And if any bill goes up, it needs to report whether that committee has been consulted in relation to the impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. And if the advice of the Parliamentary Committee is not taken the reasons why, and that's an important distinction. The other is that there is there's no set qualifications for people who might be either nominated or elected at the state level, other than them being a fit and proper person. And they will be requirements for them to do that.

We've also talked about in the principles about capacity development, and that's going to be really important. We're not expecting from day one, that this was going to be a really polished operation, it's going to emerge over time. And we see that from most people who join boards and committees, they need to be brought up to speed, do the AICD course or any of these courses. And we've proposed that in the report that we have to really look at the development of these people, so that once you get up to the national level even though you came from a state or a territory, you're not representing the interest of the state of the territory, once you get up to the national level, you're representing the interest of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the nation. So you leave your organisation at the door and get in there and talk about what we as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people need and what best suits our needs across the board.

LETITIA HOPE: Thanks, Tom. A couple of other questions that have come in, will the submissions be published? The answer is yes, here people, the drafters have elected to publish them.

TOM CALMA AO: Yes, if they agree to publish, they will be otherwise, they won't be. Yeah.

LETITIA HOPE: That's right, absolutely. It's more of a comment. There's a comment that says on the ground community say community delivery works best, but with funding cuts that governments try to impose in original models where community voices are lost. So I think that the premise there is that as things get tighter, the voice gets lost out into community. Hopefully the flexibility being driven by what communities think is the best desegregation and we'll improve community delivery whilst ensuring voices aren't lost. I think the question is trying to say, will the Local Regional Voice get to and ensure that the heart of community their aspirations are actually fit in and the answer is yes, that is absolutely-

TOM CALMA AO: And I think that's where the role of the Ethics Council could help guide that process to make sure that due process is being covered, but not to be able to direct the Voice or the local and regional structure, but to be able to provide that assurance. One of the examples that cropped up in New South Wales during the consultations was about one of the big reports that went in a couple of years ago that I was party to it. And that was about the pathways to justice report on indigenous incarceration. 2017, that went into the government as yet it still hasn't seen the light of day or any response to it. But the question wants to about, okay, in Burke, we've got a justice reinvestment model that is working. Why isn't that rolled out across the state of New South Wales, because it's working in Burke. And look, if that's what the Local and Regional Voice people see that as a priority, that's what we take up to the government. And hopefully they'll respond accordingly if they're hearing the views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as well as other Australians.

LETITIA HOPE:

So just on that, we've got a few more questions, but I think one of the things we haven't talked about, or you did touch on earlier is the really important role that what this means for governments and jurisdictional bodies, local government, state, government, and Commonwealths, because one of the big changes here, and we've seen this emerging under Closing the Gap, which you've mentioned is actually how the bureaucracy comes together and kind of ensures that it is having a respectful long partnership conversation with community based on their aspirations and taking away the need for community to have to traverse portfolios and silos and departments to try and get their aspirations on the table. And so quite a lot of work is being done. As you said, I know we've got a few jurisdictions online, but quite a lot of work has been done through our senior officials group, where we are talking directly with our States and territory jurisdictions and local government of course are represented the...

To talk about how we kind of get these mechanisms working, this is about ensuring that there's a respectful partnership in a conversation that means government has to do some heavy lifting internally about how we go out and consult or talk to community about their aspirations, and ensure that we're getting that feeding and heaven forbid not wedging communities by one approach here and then a different approach there. So there's quite a lot of work happening in regard to that space. The NIAA is working very closely with states and territories on these issues to make sure that the mechanisms are right, as well as the understanding about what partnership long-term respectful partnership actually means.

TOM CALMA AO:

Yeah, and I think the gold standard within the Commonwealth at the moment has been the development. And this goes back a few years now of co-design and corporate governance, was the establishment of the National Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Health Plan. And then the implementation plan that was jointly led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and senior officials in Department of Health, as well as all the other agencies got together, as well as the community sector and community control sector or part of that. And that that refresher is still happening. And it is a very, I guess deliberative process of co-design.

LETITIA HOPE:

So, Tom, one question for you, probably one for me, question here, what advice for emerging leaders given our people are 25% of our people are under 25. What advice do you have for emerging leaders?

TOM CALMA AO:

Well, look, I think yeah, it's more than that, I've 63% of our population of the last census were under 30 and just close to 50% where we're under 20. And I'm remiss in not talking about this, but as part of the National Voice model, we've talked about two Standing Committees that would provide advice to the National Voice. One of those is Youth Standing Committee, which would provide advice to the National Voice as well as a Indigenous Disability Standing Committee, but there's also a provision to establish other standing committees as, and when required on specialist topic areas already. And then we'd consider this and it was used as one of the examples, but the LGB community and the extended community might have a committee when that comes up and it could be on any range of topics where we need to get expert advice and we've made provision.

But the other question, it hasn't emerged yet, but it emerged in consultations is how do you fund all of this? Well, one of the things that, that we haven't been prescriptive on funding because there is that flexibility around the number of regions and how it is, but what we have made really clear and governments heard it is that this is not a cheap exercise. If we're going to do it properly, each of those regional bodies need to have a secretariat and support staff to be able to provide that information at that level equally the national level there needs to be adequate funding and providing anything less diminishes our capacity to be good partners in this. And I think government to states heard that. But we haven't been really focused on the funding other than getting a broad commitment that it's going to cost.

LETITIA HOPE:

Yeah, absolutely. Two more questions, a question, will the Local Regional Voices be already nominated parties from the Australian Government, or would this role be open to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people? The answer is no, they won't be nominated by government, memberships of Local Original Voices will be decided by communities within themselves based on the principles that we outlined, those nine principles that we talked about a little bit earlier on. And there was another question around funding, Tom, which you've already answered a question here probably for me, but certainly happy for your views. What's your number one tip for ensuring we keep the Indigenous Voice involved in our work in the APS, no matter where we work and what level? I think this goes back to understanding our role in the APS. And it goes back to a little bit about what you were talking about in relation to the way Health have done that refresh, regardless of what agency you work in, or what jurisdiction you work in, or what level you are, it is part of our responsibility to make sure that we are listening and we are asking. So if we were going out to do a consultation in the COVID vaccination One B is a really good example where we are working very closely with Health, and we have their people on the ground, and we have the NIAA people on the ground who are talking to community about their aspirations and what's happening in that space. So making sure that as you're doing program delivery and design, regardless of where you sit, that you are reaching out across jurisdictions and reaching out across agencies and reaching into community to have those conversations is really fundamental. But of course, that is what this infrastructure, the Local Regional Voice at the local regional level and the National Voice at the national level is trying to actually get underneath and ensure that we've got good mechanisms to do that, because we also know that many of our mob are very well over consulted, consulted a lot, but not necessarily always listened to. And that's part of the essential nature of what this Voice process is about.

TOM CALMA AO:

Yeah. Yeah. I agree. And I think what this approach is about getting a systemic approach to, and a systematic approach to what, how do we involve Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander people through a co-design process to make sure that legislations or policies or programs best meet our needs. And yeah, so we have existing mechanisms, there are quite a number and we divided a good amount of the report to looking at those. And so I'd really encourage everybody to have a look at the... I can't remember which appendix it was, but it's probably

LETITIA HOPE:

The Environments Scan, its called.

TOM CALMA AO: Yeah, Environments Scan, yeah. And that looks at what exists out there. And we'll all be shocked. Let's see how many and that's not everything that's out there, but that just really highlights the issue in that we've got multiple activities happening across the nation. But we're still not being able to get traction or have impact. And so what we've got to look at okay, is how's the best way to be able to, to achieve that. And the voice is one of those mechanisms, particularly at the local and regional and the national level, but part of the way is being paved through the national agreement with the Coalition of Peaks on Closing the Gap. But that is only representing one element of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. And what we're proposing is broadening it out.

And particularly, and this is going to be the challenge. And I think we learned a lot through this COVID period, that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the nation are very keen to get involved. And we've had Zooms and other virtual meetings with people in them, remote area, as long as they can get an internet connection they're able to participate. And so this modern technology, that's why I started up by saying this is a really a futuristic approach. We can't look at what's here today, but where do we want to be in the future? We know that that things can happen very rapidly with COVID, universities who many of them thought that they couldn't do things on the line, all of a sudden had to do it online. All of a sudden, it's now common practice to have a online courses or a combination between teaching virtually as well as in the classroom.

So yeah, let's look at the future and let's look at it positively and what we can achieve. But the key thing is for me is that we have our first ever we've had the opportunity to have a Minister for Indigenous Affairs who is an Indigenous person, which brings a whole lot of different approach, in a much more I guess, consultative and collective approach. We have a government that's indicating that they will entertain the process and funding the recommendation one, the co-design process, which I think is really important. And so let's take advantage of that at the moment.

And even amongst other political parties, both major and minor and, and independence, there's a healthy discussion taking place out there where we go to in the future. And I guess we look at the other overlay and that's what's being achieved through the RAPs, the Reconciliation Action Plans, and many government departments and private sector organisations have RAPs. And that is also bringing another collective dimension together where there is engagement with the population. So we're at I think a period of time where we have to harness the opportunity now.

LETITIA HOPE: I totally agree. Two more questions, really about the timing of the consultation processes, and can we slow it down? And I guess it's really important to remind people that this is only the first step of engagement. This is an interim report. And there'll be further extensions of processes around designed for local region by region, community by community. There's a lot more work we have to do. This is the early stages in the process while a lot of work has been done. Any comments on that, Tom?

TOM CALMA AO:

We've done a lot of justice to this interim report, and that's why we're going out asking people for their feedback on the internal report. Because it's really looked at what's gone on in the past and what's existing out there now and how we can really just capitalise on all of this to make sure that we do have a voice. You might recall that recommendation one was that we have a co-design process that is established in and considered by government in this term of Parliament. And then the current term of Parliament could go until probably early next year, but it could go in the next month or two, who knows where we're going to go. So we've got to consider that. It's not as if this is not a report that's being well-considered and it's not only been a desktop audit, but it's collectively all those voices and that experience, and have a look at the internal report because we've got a bio there on every individual that was in part of the co-design process.

And I think you'll be impressed as we were with the number of people their backgrounds. And for me, what I was most impressed about was that people, we work together. And as you mentioned, Letitia, there was robust discussion, but at the end of the day, it was all about the interest of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and not about individual interests. And so that really, for me begs really well for the future and today the consultations have been very positive. And I think the point of difference is one point, I think we all to avoid, we all want Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander people to be more actively involved in decisions that are made for us, we want to be by us and be part of that.

We know that there's a general mood out there in the population and what reconciliation Australia gets through their barometer, indicates that there is a changing mood, has been for many years about people wanting to see Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people incorporated into the Constitution. Hasn't been a lot from RI side on viewpoint about a Voice, but that's the next barometer we'll test that sort of attitude. But yeah, it's pretty positive out there. And I think that's where we will gain some traction, but it's really important for everybody here, that's online to A: do a couple of things. One is if you want to write a submission, do so doesn't have to be long, it could be just picking an element of the report and writing about that, or importantly we've got a online, you'll see in a survey that you can complete.

And we want everybody to do that and to get your views because it's a survey that's only going to half a dozen questions in it, and that'll give us feedback as to what your thinking is and help shape what the reports have been out. And so I think there are two really important ones and of course, where there's community consultations, just to have a look on the website and every week we refresh as to where the next lot of consultations are going to be. And so yeah, we can get involved, but really Letitia, I think it's been a good process, a positive process.

I must say that I was impressed by the way that government officials have been very willing to work with us as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in this co-design process. And also to recognise the really clear distinction. This is not a government report. This is a report by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, a report to government on what we think should be the way forward. And that's through the internal report feedback on the internal report. And then what the final report is. But that's really concludes our time. I think I'd just to extend a big, thank you to everybody who's been online. I'd like to thank IPAA for hosting this event. It's really important that we do have opportunities to be able to discuss these issues far and wide, but also for everybody to have a responsibility, both indigenous and non-indigenous people to have a say about what our future be. So, thank you.

LETITIA HOPE: So please go to voice.niaa.gov.au, and make sure that you have your say.

TOM CALMA AO: Yeah, important. Thank you.

LETITIA HOPE: Thank you.