



30th April 2021

Voice Secretariat

Email: Co-designVoice@niaa.gov.au

Dear Committee Members

Indigenous Voice Co-Design Process

This submission expresses Pilbara for Purpose's support for the creation of a Representative Advisory Voice to Parliament as detailed in the *Interim Report on the Indigenous Voice Co-Design Process*. We thank you for the opportunity to offer comments on the Interim Report on the design of this National Voice.

About Pilbara for Purpose (P4P)

Pilbara for Purpose (P4P) is the peak membership body of the 'For Purpose' sector in the Pilbara. P4P is the connector of Pilbara community services in the Pilbara, enabling it to achieve best practice, foster effective collaboration and have a voice at the regional level. We have members from across the Pilbara who deliver a range of social services to the Pilbara communities. Governed by a group of experienced Directors from across the Pilbara, with a passion for the sector, P4P strives to operate as a regional peak body that is trusted, promotes innovation, actively collaborates and represents the vibrancy, resilience and needs of the For Purpose sector in the Pilbara.

Pilbara for Purpose's position

For too long, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices have been absent or insignificant in local, regional and national decision making. The process of "consultation" with Aboriginal people and communities has served to further exclude Aboriginal people from authority; relegating them to a frustratingly passive position on decisions that impact their daily lives. Aboriginal people are the only ones that will make intergenerational changes in their families. Service providers can only enable real change in authentic partnership with the people in our communities. An authentic partnership demands that Aboriginal voices will influence decisions and develop locally-led solutions to address locally identified issues. Our region will only see real change and start closing the gap when we work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and involve them in the development of policies and targets that will create a better future for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia. Indeed, as the cohort with most at risk, it would be unnecessary poor practice to reject the offer that a Voice to Parliament provides.

Pilbara for Purpose supports the recommendations made by the 'From the Heart' campaign in response to the *Interim Report to the Australian Government: Indigenous Voice Co-Design Process*. These include:

1. *The government must honour its election commitment to a referendum once the model for the Voice has been settled to ensure a First Nation's Voice to Parliament is protected by the Constitution.*





Pilbara for Purpose strongly supports the development of a First Nations Voice, representative of voices across national, regional and local communities, that is enshrined in the Australian Constitution as defined in the Uluru Statement from the Heart ('the National Voice').

Though a First Nations Voice to Parliament may be established by other means, enshrining a First Nations' Voice in the Australian Constitution will provide the surety and continuity needed to make long-term positive changes in our communities, by ensuring that the National Voice is not vulnerable to short term election cycles or changes in government policy and perspective. A constitutional referendum will allow the Voice to have the public legitimacy and authority it needs to ensure the government and Parliament take its advice seriously. A successful referendum to enshrine a Voice will be a historic and unifying moment for our nation.

- 2. Enabling legislation for the Voice must be passed after a referendum has been held in the next term of Parliament.*

It is preferable that a successful referendum is held prior to enabling legislation for the Voice. Any move to implement the Voice through legislation prior to a referendum may represent risk to the success of the Voice and may create confusion among the Australian public. There is a desire to provide an opportunity for the Australian people, through a referendum, to understand and show their support for a Voice that is enshrined in the Constitution before empowering legislation establishing a Voice to parliament and the government. We believe it is time for the government to put the Voice to the Australian people in a referendum.

Nevertheless, should a referendum-based First Nations Voice be untenable, we would recommend that another path to delivery be articulated and implemented to ensure the opportunity for partnership and reform does not dissolve due to the process of public governance.

- 3. The membership model for the National Voice must ensure previously unheard Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the same chance of being selected as established leadership figures*

For the National Voice to be legitimate, credible and effective it needs to be truly representative of the diverse populations and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the country. Indeed, the concept of First Nations – many distinct nations with the right/responsibility to speak for 'their country' - is the guiding principle of Aboriginal authority.

It is imperative that the people chosen or elected across the state will be *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander* persons from the *Australian First Nation people*. All too often the title advertised is for Indigenous people and we end up with Indigenous people from other countries in the roles speaking on behalf of First Nations People and not the Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander people.

The proposed 18 person State/Territory equalisation model proposed in the Interim Voice Co-Design Report allows for 2 representatives per State/Territory.



For Western Australia, which is the largest state in the country (32.9%), it is problematic that only two members from WA would represent the diversity and needs of a population of more than 100,000 spread across a vast area of 2,527,013 square kilometres. Over 60% of WA's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples live in regional, remote and very remote parts of the state, and 46% live in the most disadvantaged areas. In the Pilbara region, 16% of the population are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Many of these people live in areas of the Pilbara that have high levels of disadvantage and very low Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas scores. In Roebourne, an area that rates among the most disadvantaged in Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples make up almost 70% of the population.

The Voice Co-Design Report suggests that members selected for the National Voice should 'as much as possible have connection to the local community level'. Whilst Pilbara for Purpose recognises that the Local and Regional Voices will work to provide local views to the National Voice, we support From the Heart's position that a National Voice representative model must be based on population distribution and need and give greater proportional Voice to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in regional and remote areas to ensure connection to local community. There must be sufficient scale of membership of the National Voice to ensure the voices of the most disadvantaged are heard and represented. Without this, the legitimacy and credibility of the Voice may be compromised.

Roebourne in the Pilbara can be used as an example to demonstrate the overwhelming need to engage local community voices in all decision-making processes that govern their daily lives.

The Roebourne and Martu Expenditure Review conducted by the Department of Premier and Cabinet highlighted that despite over \$94.5 million being spent on an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of 800 through 206 services/programs delivered by more than 60 providers, there was a failure to improve the outcomes for a community entrenched with social and health issues.

In contrast, the 6718 Advantage Plan, which was formed by the local people who gathered at Elders and Community Yarns, is Roebourne's own Closing the Gap plan. The 6718 plan is built by and for the whole community, working together for their people. It recognises and reinforces cultural authority and plans for a bright future for the town. Through this 6718 Advantage Plan, key issues for disadvantaged Aboriginal residents have been identified, strategies have been developed to close the gap in education, housing, community safety, youth development and men's health. Indeed, the formation of partnership with Government is the critical element to deliver on the 6718 plan. This is a long term coordinated approach with a clear community drive and commitment from all stakeholders to deliver locally led solutions. It has led to a greater level of ownership, leadership, agency and capability within the Roebourne community and demonstrated the crucial importance of local voices in all levels of decision making – especially at the top. Only by allowing local leaders to hold authority can we anticipate solutions and recovery.

Pilbara for Purpose also supports the 'From the Heart' position that there needs to be adequate membership provision for frontline and community-focused people to be selected/elected to the National Voice, regardless of whether they are an established leadership figure or not. Again, this requires sufficient scale of membership that is not limited to 2 representatives per State/Territory.



Pilbara for Purpose

Going forward, Pilbara for Purpose understands that this co-design process is not complete and that it is critical that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples fully understand what the Voice is and means for them, and are able to contribute their experience and ideas into this consultative process. There is need to ensure that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, in all States and Territories and all regional and remote areas, understand the co-design process to date, the key outcomes of the Interim Report and how they can contribute to this process going forward. We have concerns that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, organisations and corporations are either not aware of the Interim Report or have struggled to read and understand the entire Report in order to make an informed submission.

We would like to recommend that the Interim Report be summarised into a format that is easy to read and understand and shared widely to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia. Existing local and regional networks and linkages should be utilised to share key information on the Co-Design process and how individuals and organisations can provide their input and make informed submissions. We support the ongoing process of co-design between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and government and recommend that the current engagement approach be extended to inform and seek feedback from all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in all regional and remote areas across the country.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our submission.

Yours sincerely,

Sylvia Winkler
P4P Treasurer, on behalf of the P4P Board Executive

This submission is supported by the following P4P members in the Pilbara:

VSwans, Onslow
Nintirri Centre, Tom Price
Puntukurnu Aboriginal Medical Service, Newman
Pilbara Disability Advocacy, Newman
Relationships Australia, South Hedland Branch
Hope Community Services, Karratha
Headspace Pilbara, Karratha
East Pilbara Independence Support, Newman
Youth Involvement Council, South Hedland
Well Women's Centre, South Hedland
Robe River Kuruma Aboriginal Corporation, Karratha
The Salvation Army, Karratha
Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation, Karratha

