

Conferences may further confuse constitutional recognition process, says expert

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Chloe Booker

The co-chairman of the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples has raised concerns that the Indigenous conferences on constitutional recognition may wind back the process.

Les Malezer, who was on the government's original expert panel, was in Melbourne at the weekend for a national Aboriginal meeting to consider constitutional recognition and alternatives.

He agreed with fellow Aboriginal leader Noel Pearson that negotiations were heading in the right direction.

However, he wasn't positive the discussions would deliver a clear answer on what should be put forward to a referendum.

"I think that we're on track because we've got all involved parties working now with a common understanding of what the next stage is," he said.

"The challenge still remains that the question is open, there are a number of options on the table and whether our people are able to make up their minds in this next consultation process or whether it will lead to a widening of the discussion."

Mr Malezer said the congress had wanted the government to say what it would support before any consultations but now they were proceeding before it had presented a position.

He said it would be "disappointing" if the work the expert panel had done was dismissed, suspecting the terms of references for this next committee would be the same.

"The expert panel was given a task to provide proposals to the government on what should be put up for a referendum that was capable to be supported by the majority of Australians," he said.

"We're having a repetition of what was put in place five years ago. It had a terms of reference that it had to be capable of being delivered by a referendum.

"This next step could very well deliver proposals and suggestions that are not capable of being successful."

Mr Malezer said people at the weekend conference were confused by the process as the objective for constitutional recognition became more complex.

"People are confused with so many options and proposals being put forward," he said.

"It is no longer what the people want but what do the politicians want as well."