



Department of
**Local Government, Sport
and Cultural Industries**

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Mr Darren Foster
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Dear Darren

DEVELOPING THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT'S ABORIGINAL EMPOWERMENT STRATEGY

The Western Australian Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries (DLGSC) welcomes the opportunity to provide comments to inform the development of the Western Australian Government's Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy (the Strategy). The following comments also include input from the Western Australian Museum (WAM), the State Library of Western Australia (SLWA) and the Art Gallery of Western Australia (AGWA).

The DLGSC notes the consultation process undertaken in the development of the discussion paper for the Strategy and encourages similar engagement in the development and implementation. The DLGSC notes that this is an iterative process and welcomes the opportunity for further discussion to develop systems and structures that will underpin this transformative approach. The role of the public sector will be critical to encourage the employment of Aboriginal people to strengthen its capacity to plan for, engage and maximise the benefits of the Strategy.

A key reflection is this strategy represents a new approach to strengthen and legitimise Aboriginal led civic participation and representation. It is an opportunity to review the intent and impact of the *Aboriginal Affairs Planning Act 1972*.

Yours sincerely

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Director General

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Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural industries
Submission to inform
A Path Forward – Developing the Western Australian Government’s
Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy (the Strategy)

The Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries (DLGSC) recognises and supports the development of this Strategy and understands that by putting family and culture at the centre, DLGSC has an important role to play in progressing this Strategy within the department and with our key stakeholders. Valuing, celebrating and promoting Aboriginal people’s cultures, family and traditional languages is integral to Aboriginal culture.

To be effective State Government agencies need to be united in a shared strategic vision and may need to further explore how they can best deliver a coordinated approach across both government departments and within our own departments.

Further, to ensure successful delivery across Western Australia, the State Government must work with local government, particularly within the regional areas. The key mechanism to drive this conversation is the State Local Government Partnership Agreement signed in 2017.

In developing this submission, DLGSC has framed the responses against the strategy elements, highlighting key observations and opportunities for further consideration.

1. Putting culture at the centre

DLGSC supports the intent of this section. The maintenance of language and culture supports the development of a person’s sense of identity and belonging, crucial to a person’s wellbeing. Culture permeates all aspects of life and is essential to the overall well-being of Aboriginal communities and individuals.

DLGSC is very supportive of policies and programs that allow Aboriginal people to fully participate in cultural practice. The Western Australian Language Services Policy recognises that language is integral to culture and that the principles articulate the importance of service accessibility in terms of cultural and language background.

DLGSC suggests the emphasis should be on ‘family’ – connecting with family is key to Aboriginal people’s cultural wellbeing. Family is not mentioned within the Strategy. Helping find family, especially in relation to the stolen generation, is paramount as a connection to family comes first followed by a connection to country.

There is an opportunity to review the current support and funding of traditional languages and their preservation, including through the collection of oral and video histories.

Further consideration needs to be given to our collections across the State and how we can work towards co-custodianship, like the model in New Zealand with 'first nations people' for artefacts and materials currently owned by the State. Similarly, we need to have further discussion about access to family history related records that are held by the State Government to look at barriers that stop people getting access and how we can improve the process to ensure that this is culturally safe and accessible.

For example:

- The WA Museum is already exploring these models, as well as a temporary keeping place for human remains being returned to country from overseas.
- The State Library's Storylines platform is a digital keeping place of Aboriginal stories connecting families and communities to the Library's collections and records and supports access to collections, preservation of language and culture and involves communities in the decisions about these collections.

DLGSC suggests consideration of Aboriginal culture should be reflected and observable in all government agreements and suggests that this could be achieved through an overarching agreement that is an addendum to all negotiated agreements that give recognition to country and culture.

2. Bringing decisions closer to communities through empowered engagement and agreement-making

DLGSC supports the intent of this element and suggests that a review of the *Aboriginal Affairs Planning Act 1972* would be a good starting point, to ensure the right consultative framework is in place that reflects contemporary society and are culturally inclusive and appropriate. DLGSC also notes this space for a greater focus on leadership and civic participation, and suggests consideration be given to the design of an implementation plan on how best to do this in a culturally secure and meaningful way.

Empowerment means stepping back and letting local communities make their own decisions. Government's role is stewardship and ensuring the right policy settings are in place to support local decision making and issues that matter, for example domestic violence and economic development. There needs to be a whole of government approach to engagement rather than the current overlap of services between various agencies whereby Aboriginal people are constantly being consulted. This leads to fatigue and a perception that nothing happens after consultation.

In terms of service design and delivery, DLGSC notes the challenges facing the provision of human services in rural and remote areas, small regional cities and emerging markets, and the need to improve outcomes for Aboriginal people. There is an opportunity to improve outcomes over the long term through better design and implementation of policies to commission and deliver services in remote Aboriginal communities.

The role of local government could be strengthened to support the intent for greater place-based decision making and service delivery.

DLGSC welcomes the observation that reforms to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of human services take time and will require a transition strategy to ensure continued access to essential support programs.

DLGSC supports the focus on community outcomes as the key criteria for defining service quality, efficiency and effectiveness, and policies being adjusted to reflect this approach.

Some further opportunities for consideration:

- Strategic investment framework needs to be clearly defined and integrated across government and reflected in grant funding mechanisms
- Policy Framework needs to be updated in the regions to make procurement easier for small local businesses
- Partnerships with Aboriginal businesses needs to be fostered at a local level
- Service providers to be able to adapt to changes or improve outcomes to offer sustainability of local jobs and services
- Increased government employment opportunities
- Local government and PBC working agreements to be established to help deliver outcomes.

3. Investing more in preventative and early-intervention initiatives

DLGSC supports the intent of this element and the need to focus on prevention that is culturally safe and reflective of intergenerational trauma. Systemic change is required.

Research over time demonstrates that education is the key to improving outcomes but needs to be embedded and monitored to ensure outcomes are achieved and any problems are identified. For example, hearing loss is a major issue in Aboriginal communities, but this has become normalised and therefore not seen as a disadvantage for these people, which leads to poorer outcomes. There is a need for greater investment and coordination of approach across agencies.

Further, well located, well designed and properly maintained community infrastructure is critical for public health and the well-being of local communities. DLGSC is well placed to support the Department of the Premier and Cabinet (DPC) with considerations on infrastructure investment and opportunities. Tailored programs are also critical, for example the State Library's Better Beginnings literacy program has a stream focussing specifically on Aboriginal culture and stories and features the delivery of books to families that have been written or illustrated by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people to assist develop literacy skills and connection to culture.

Local health planning for Aboriginal communities should inform local investment and this can be embedded in the existing statutory requirements¹.

¹ *Public Health Act 2016*, Local Government are required to develop local health plans for their district. Statutes are not presumed to bind the crown unless explicit

For example, this framework could be developed, like the Local Government Strategic Community plans². This framework would enable Aboriginal communities to plan for their futures and identify what needs and services are required. Such plans could be used to guide investment decisions and complement the community layout plans.

The plans would contribute to and inform several other Commonwealth/State Government Partnership Agreements, State Government health planning frameworks and local government local health plans. Development of Aboriginal community local health plans would provide better evidence for place-based planning approaches to the design and delivery of health programs from government directly and non-government agencies contracted to deliver services on behalf of government.

DLGSC has carriage of the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework (IPR) framework and reporting from local government. There is a potential to pilot development of such plans. DLGSC is already investing in the development of better tools and resources for local government and this could be an opportunity to complement the strategy implementation and progress with the Aboriginal Lands Trust (ALT) or the Western Australian Aboriginal Advisory Council (WAAAC) into the future.

The strategy recognises the need to improve and foster better community governance and alignment to government frameworks. Opportunities to develop skills and capacities in communities for people to effectively carry out the tasks of governance so that it delivers tangible benefits for communities and people. DLGSC would welcome the opportunity to work with the Strategy to improve Aboriginal people's representation on local government. DLGSC totally supports the principle of prevention and early intervention but it needs to be recognised that we are still dealing with a legacy of problems that are too long established to be prevented.

DLGSC supports the assertion that improving health and education outcomes is central to the Strategy and will require strong support for successful implementation. There are many powerful examples of programs that have improved outcomes and delivered economic opportunities for example the Revealed Program, Sporting and Arts programs that foster cultural identity empowerment and strengthen connection to country.

Another example is the State Library's Storyline program which is a digital keeping place of Aboriginal stories connecting families and communities to the Library's collections and records. DLGSC would welcome the opportunity to work with DPC to identify further opportunities with our key stakeholders including sporting associations, arts and cultural organisations, local government and our cultural institutions.

4. Boosting economic opportunities across all areas of Government activity

DLGSC supports the intent and the need to foster greater economic opportunities and participation.

² Local Governments, in accordance with the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework (IPR) within the *Local Government Act 1995*, are required to develop plans for the future with their communities.

To strengthen the Strategy consideration of the protection of Intellectual Property related to traditional culture to underpin economic opportunity also needs to be considered.

There also should be flexibility for the region to respond to local economic and labour market needs and conditions, devising solutions for Australian businesses where there are skills gaps to be met by the local labour market.

All levels of Government have an important role to facilitate new opportunities and to create an environment that encourages investment and leads to productivity and economic growth.

The Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) has initiated a project to develop a Framework to guide the economic development activities of WA local governments. Part of the scope of work is to identify new drivers of growth to fill the gap created by business investment and identifying legislative impediments to economic development in the regions.

As part of this work, data has been collected across WA regions which highlight opportunities to strengthen trade opportunities and population growth.³

Local governments are also critical stakeholders in WA's cultural infrastructure. In 2018/19 local governments in WA invested a combined total of \$15.5 million in capital expenditure towards arts and culture facilities.

The WA public library network is the most used, valued and accessible of all cultural services in the state with:

- 232 public libraries
- over 900,000 active WA members
- more than 14 million in-person and online visits each year
- public libraries in WA locations where there is no other cultural infrastructure.

Libraries are safe places that are located in every local government area in the state that provide free resources for people to learn, create, discover and belong; including access to the internet to be able to search and apply for employment.

There is increasing interest in authentic Aboriginal culture, stories and experiences. In Australia, cultural tourism is a growing sub-sector of the tourism economy and market demand for cultural and heritage tourism in Australia has outpaced overall tourism growth. Cultural tourists typically stay longer and spend more than the average tourist.

The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) has developed a Two-Year Plan for Nature-Based Tourism in WA with a central aim to promote ancient, contemporary and living Aboriginal culture and heritage across WA.

³ A summary of the research, the Economic Development Framework materials and policy priorities, can be found on the WALGA website at www.walga.asn.au/EconomicDevelopment

Maintaining and celebrating Aboriginal art, culture and heritage is an integral part of this sub-sector. By growing Aboriginal creative industry and cultural tourism businesses; fostering cultural continuity, cultural security, cultural healing and contributing to the wellbeing of Aboriginal people; it is possible to build more vibrant and inclusive communities.

DLGSC is currently finalising a Cultural Infrastructure Strategy, which can contribute to achieving the objectives of Tourism WA, DBCA's Action Plan, and WA's tourism ambitions moving forward, by encouraging the growth of a wide variety of cultural experiences from world-class museums to distinctive vibrant local neighbourhoods.

Cultural infrastructure includes the buildings, places, spaces, technology and people necessary for arts and cultural education, creation, production, engagement, collaboration, ceremony, preservation, conservation, interpretation, sharing and distribution, both tangible and intangible.

The potential exists for government to assist in the procurement of Aboriginal businesses. Other government initiatives like Streamline WA and Diversify WA are looking at the cost of regulation and reform and their observations will be important considerations as the implementation plan is developed.

Reducing red tape within the procurement process within regional areas is necessary to improve the outcomes for local Aboriginal businesses, enabling more opportunities for contracts or partnerships with State and local government.

DLGSC is supporting sustainable regional communities through investment and identification of tourism opportunities to attract greater trade and inbound visitation. The role the arts and sports can play in attracting overseas investment into co-product/content development, attracting entrepreneurs and the skilled workforce can be achieved through a synchronicity of local government initiatives, regional economic development initiatives and liaison with the Commonwealth on opportunities.

5. Building cultural understanding and respect

DLGSC believes there is an opportunity to review the *Aboriginal Affairs Planning Act 1972* to ensure contemporary governance framework.

A bipartisan approach to Aboriginal Affairs is needed to ensure continuity of programs and services and a long-term approach to address the systemic change is required.

The strategy and its implementation must reflect what Aboriginal people want at a community level, not just an organisational or government level.