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Enquiries: Jessica van der Waag

27 March 2020

Ms Emily Roper
A/Director General
Department of Premier and Cabinet
Email: AboriginalPolicy@dpc.wa.gov.au

Dear Ms Roper



**A PATH FORWARD: DEVELOPING THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN
GOVERNMENT'S ABORIGINAL EMPOWERMENT STRATEGY**

Thank you for the opportunity to review and provide comment on the plan 'A Path Forward: Developing the Western Australian Government's Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy'.

The Great Southern Development Commission (GSDC) understands that the plan is intended to underpin all government agencies, with the overall goal 'Aboriginal people, families and communities being empowered to live good lives and choose their own futures from a secure foundation'.

Within our role of coordinating and supporting endeavours that build an integrated regional economy and foster regional growth, GSDC works with a range of Aboriginal Corporations and individuals to support projects that aim to deliver economic outcomes for Aboriginal people in our region. Our Board of Management includes Mrs Vernice Gillies, Menang Elder, who has a background in child protection and education.

Please find following feedback in regards specific areas of the plan:

- *Recommendation for a regional decision-making structure for local, state and commonwealth government, to underpin better coordination. Aboriginal people should have a formal and systematic role in that decision making.*

The GSDC notes the importance of coordination across Local, State and Australian Government and the role of Aboriginal people in decision making. Within the Great Southern region, there are many existing structures which can lead to duplication of services and efforts.

We recognise there may be benefits in bringing groups together and streamlining through a regional decision-making structure. Of particular importance will be the level and geographical spread of representation to ensure small regional communities are included. Further, clear and formal processes for communication

and dissemination of information back to local communities will be critical to ensure decision making is transparent and accessible.

- *Use of negotiated agreements between government and traditional owner groups to have Aboriginal people's priorities identified and linked to resourcing/initiatives.*

It is not clear from the plan the types of situations where such an agreement would be used. We note that the intention is for collaborative approaches to economic development, and as a structure to enable greater involvement in decision making. The GSDC would welcome further clarity on when such agreements may apply and the mechanisms for initiation and negotiation.

- *Supporting Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to deliver services, both through capacity building and design of those organisations, and funding and procurement processes.*

There may be opportunity to utilise the existing Local Content Adviser (LCA) Network, located within the nine Regional Development Commissions through the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. The LCAs have a lead role in maximising local content opportunities, including goods, services and jobs, for State Government funded projects.

- *Increased investment in early intervention initiatives – including economic development initiatives, youth and early years.*

The GSDC is supportive of investment into early intervention initiatives. Within the region there are a number of established early childhood programs including the locally driven A Smart Start Great Southern, the Early Years Initiative (central Great Southern), and Best Beginnings program. In addition, the need for targeted intervention for youth in high school has been identified by community leaders across the central Great Southern, particularly within the context of increasing methamphetamine use within these communities. We have received feedback on the importance of ensuring key programs are provided long-term funding (eg 10 years plus).

- *Boosting Economic Opportunities across all areas of Government Activity – particularly culture-based economies.*

The GSDC is supportive of this recommendation, Aboriginal Economic Development is a focus area within GSDC operations.

If have any queries in relation to this matter, please contact Jessica van der Waag, Regional Development Officer, on 9821 3211.

Yours faithfully



BRUCE MANNING
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

9/4/20