



Western Australia Regional Development Alliance (WARDA)

Department of the Premier and Cabinet
Aboriginal Policy and Coordination Unit

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To whom it may concern

WARDA FEEDBACK ON DRAFT DISCUSSION PAPER – A PATH FORWARD: DEVELOPING THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT’S ABORIGINAL EMPOWERMENT STRATEGY

Thank you for the opportunity provided to all Commission CEO’s to review and provide feedback on the abovementioned draft strategy.

We submit the following feedback on behalf of the Western Australia Regional Development Alliance (WARDA) which comprises of the nine Chief Executive Officers of the Regional Development Commissions and the DG of DPIRD. WARDA’s role is to foster co-operative effort between the RDC’s and DPIRD to encourage, promote, facilitate and monitor economic development across regional WA.

Feedback was received from three Commissions being Peel, Mid-West and Gascoyne. Other Commissions have indicated that they may submit individual feedback directly to the Unit.

Some high-level common points of feedback across the submissions included the following:-

- Commissions are generally supportive of the principles and concepts outlined in the discussion paper
- Need community based solutions
- Regional action plans may be better served by using traditional aboriginal regions rather than Commonwealth, State or Local government prescribed boundaries
- Strategy and future action plans need to build in culturally appropriate capacity building initiatives for Aboriginal people and groups
- The Aboriginal community must be given the driver’s seat in the discussion ensuring that they have a direct say and input on the final strategy
- Aboriginal communities must be empowered to make decisions that affect them
- Literacy and educational attainment of Aboriginal people remains a challenge in effective implementation of the Strategy.

- Importance of getting the imagery right with direct input and guidance from Aboriginal people
- Need to build the necessary skills for Aboriginal people interested in business development. Services and training delivered to Aboriginal businesses need to be tailored to suit their needs.
- State government procurement processes and contracts need to be made simpler and understandable.
- Partnerships between non indigenous and indigenous businesses can fast track capability and capacity.
- An implementation framework is needed along with a clear monitoring and evaluation tool

WARDA congratulates the Aboriginal Policy and Coordination Unit on this important step towards a shared future and for continuing the consultative discussion towards developing a comprehensive government strategy for empowering the Aboriginal people of Western Australia.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Ward', written in a cursive style.

Andrew Ward
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
PEEL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
(on behalf of WARDA)

28 February 2020

A Path Forward: Developing the WA Government's Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy

Peel Development Commission commentary

1. Are the main ideas right?

The Commission congratulates the State Government on this important step towards a shared future and is supportive of the principles and concepts outlined in the discussion paper. The following suggestions are made to add value to a strong base.

Consider including *equal access to employment* and *entrepreneurship* as Empowerment foundations in the image on page 9.

Some of the Principles on page 10 appear to be statements rather than principles. For example – *Aboriginal cultures across the State have important differences, as well as similarities* can be reworded into a principle – *Strategy and solutions will reflect the important differences and similarities of Aboriginal cultures across the State.*

Suggest including a monitoring and evaluation element into the strategic elements on page 11.

Suggest recognising the community service sector as a key local partner in strategic element 2 and 3. Existing service providers in community have a wealth of knowledge, ideas and existing relationships that can be leveraged to engage Aboriginal people in local decision making and service delivery.

Gaining increased understanding of traditional groupings in 'regions' and how these can be recognised in agreement making will be imperative to success of strategic element 2 and 3. Feedback from local elders indicates that often Government decision making and service commissioning does not recognise traditional land, culture and language groupings resulting in groups without similar culture being forced to work together, limiting positive outcomes.

Moving forward it will be imperative to ensure engagement and decision-making mechanisms are delivered in a way that meets people where they are at in terms of their capability and understanding of government process, policy, practice etc. Alongside this consideration it is suggested that the strategy and future action plans build in culturally appropriate capacity building initiatives for Aboriginal people and groups to enable effective engagement in decision making, developing local solutions, and economic activity generation. For example, the current Aboriginal Business Capability Building Program currently being implemented throughout WA is having limited impact due to the small number of Aboriginal businesses ready to engage in development at the level and way in which the program is being delivered.

The 2019 Social Impact Festival – Danjoo Koorliny Walking Together Towards 2029 considered the concept of colonisation, a process of eradicating culture and land. Strategic element 6 *Building cultural understanding and respect* could perhaps be stronger in its language and reflect the need to decolonise Government and community thinking to rebalance power and gain compassion. Strengthening the ideas on page 23 may assist in this regard for example embedding positive images of Aboriginal people in society through media, government valuing Aboriginal culture and history in decision making processes, public sector taking personal responsibility to call out racism and build allies prepared to truth tell.

2. Are we using the right words?

Others more connected to the Aboriginal community are better placed to comment on this item.

However, we would like to note the importance of getting the imagery right with direct input and guidance from Aboriginal people. For example, the image on page 9 is a powerful way to

communicate the intent of the strategy but the imagery needs to be culturally appropriate. Similarly, the wording around the image that summarises the intent needs to be considered with care. The words *Passing on culture* could be rephrased more positively to *Living through culture* or *Nurturing culture*.

3. What else should we be thinking about?

Expanding on the concept of *Putting culture at the centre*, how can we recognise, value and use Aboriginal knowledge as an asset to whole of society complex issues such as environmental degradation, caring for our elderly, medicine, sustainable agriculture and others.

How will accountability of the strategy implementation be embedded in Government processes for example through DG KPIs, agency Annual Reports.

Consideration of how the mentioned regional action plans will be developed and *Regional level decision making mechanisms* implemented to be considerate of traditional land, cultural and language groupings.

Membership of the Aboriginal Affairs Coordinating Committee does not appear to be representative of the approach / goal of the strategy. The Committee is currently made up of agencies that are service related such as Health, Communities, Justice etc and does not include development agencies such as Planning, Education, DPIRD, JTSI.

Careful thinking about how the strategy will be translated to actions that weave through other existing government priorities, planning and budget mechanisms rather than standing alone. Successful implementation will require a systems thinking approach which embeds the principles and strategic elements throughout public sector daily actions and decision making.

Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy – A Path Forward

Mid-West Development Commission commentary

Essentially the success of Aboriginal communities in the regions is linked to general success in regional Western Australia. The Mid West Development Commission therefore supports Aboriginal Communities being empowered to make decisions that affect them with the region. It also acknowledges that the objects and functions of Development Commissions are in sync with those contained in the Strategy. The Mid West Development Commission can therefore play an important role in assisting in the development of Aboriginal community controlled organisations (ACCOs).

The empowerment of ACCO's especially at the regional level is important for self-determination. Negotiated agreements between Government and traditional owners need to link to outcomes that are specific to the region. Regionally specific initiatives and regional action plans may be better served by using traditional aboriginal regions rather than Commonwealth, State or Local government prescribed boundaries that may not be appropriate for the community.

The empowerment and self-determination of regional Aboriginal businesses is essential to improve the social and economic outcomes of Aboriginal people in general. The lack of "hands on services" to Aboriginal businesses is an impediment to the sustainability and growth of these businesses. Some suggestions are outlined below:-

- Regional Aboriginal Businesses need encouragement and support to grow. The Aboriginal employment outcomes generated by these businesses are far greater than those generated by Non Aboriginal businesses.
- Support services on the ground are required. Aboriginal businesses need to be involved in having a say about what support is required for their business and how this is delivered.
- Services and training delivered to Aboriginal businesses need to be tailored to suit their needs. The traditional "stand and deliver" methods may not be suitable for Aboriginal communities. One on One support with follow up programs may be a better way to go.
- Incentives such as the Regional Aboriginal Capability Grants provide an excellent mechanism for improving capability of Aboriginal Businesses. It encourages self-determination and allows businesses to concentrate on what they are good at.
- State Government procurement processes and contracts need to be made simpler and understandable. For lower dollar value work this should be further simplified. For example, tenders could be subdivided into smaller packages making them more palatable for smaller Aboriginal businesses.
- Partnerships between Non indigenous and Indigenous businesses can fast track capability and capacity. It is important however that the relationship is equal and provides a transition mechanism whereby the indigenous business can grow their capability and capacity independently. Additional preference could be made available to aboriginal businesses that are 100% owned by aboriginal people.
- Procurement initiatives such as price preferences, direct sourcing and higher qualitative scores for aboriginal involvement continue to provide better procurement outcomes for Aboriginal businesses and should be encouraged. State Government procurement officers should be encouraged to use this mechanism. It would be useful if procurement systems were put in place so that procurement officers could embargo quotes/tenders to just aboriginal businesses.
- Government procurement preferences need to take into account the specific benefits that the traditional owners of that group are seeking to achieve. A blanket State-wide Aboriginal procurement preference can cause local friction within the community if it appears to favour an aboriginal business that does not have any cultural attachment to the area where the procurement is being undertaken.
- Initial intensive support is required when an aboriginal business is first formed. This is especially important when branching out into new areas i.e. Bush foods, Aboriginal cultural tourism, etc.
- The engagement of Aboriginal trainers and mentors by government and organisations leads to greater employment outcomes.
- Assessment of grant applications for innovative approaches to increasing regional aboriginal employment is generally undertaken by risk adverse Government officials. This leads to only a small select group of sophisticated aboriginal businesses being accepted for these types of outcomes.

A Path Forward: Developing the WA Government's Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy Gascoyne Development Commission commentary

We would like to congratulate Hon Ben Wyatt, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs for continuing the consultative discussion towards developing a comprehensive government strategy for empowering the Aboriginal people of Western Australian.

We commend the position taken in the paper for a strategy that is built around Aboriginal people's views, priorities and aspiration. We believe for this to happen, the Aboriginal community must be given the driver's seat in the discussion ensuring that besides the formalized debate on the paper a quasi-official platform is organized in their communities through their community leaders and local organizations to ensure that the people themselves have a direct say and input on the final strategy, we encourage a bottom up approach to ensure that the communities, own and drive the discussion as guardians of their own future.

Are the main ideas right?

The main ideas are generally good. The principles are well crafted and the strategic elements go to the heart of social, economic and political interests of the Aboriginal people. Bringing decisions closer to the communities and enabling community based solutions that if well-structured will be a game changer. Acknowledging and building cultural understanding and boosting economic opportunities in government and investing more in preventive initiatives are commendable for better outcomes.

However, we believe that a number of issues must be clearly illustrated in the discussion and reflected in the final document;

1. We should acknowledge that literacy and educational attainment remains a challenge in the achievement of many of the goals, therefore we should not only state the importance of education be it early education (Strategic element 4) or tertiary education (Strategic element 5) but should come out with clear strategies to ensure that more Aboriginal people access and complete their education.
2. Although we support the main ideas we can only make reasonable gains from the discussion if a comprehensive implementation framework is drafted. The strategy should therefore provide key guidelines, timelines and an approach that is detailed enough that cannot be easily departed from. The position taken by the paper to recognize the importance of having a framework is a good starting point.

3. In implementing and measuring the strategies impact it is important to also include a clear Monitoring, Evaluation, Assessment and Learning (MEAL plan) that shall ensure the strategies are strengthened through understanding and improving the strategy. It is also important that the local Aboriginal communities and local organizations play key roles in Monitoring and Evaluation, for example the local organizations and their communities can organize Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to measure, monitor and learn from the process.
4. Training modules and programs on entrepreneurship and financial management in many remote and regional areas will need to be well articulated, targeted with ongoing support to build the necessary skills for Aboriginal people interested in business development. A recent statement by a local Aboriginal Elder was they “Don’t want to be set up to fail”. The business may be able to access funding but requires ongoing support to succeed long term.
5. Affordable housing is one of the major challenges facing many regional areas including the Gascoyne region. It is suggested therefore that housing affordability to be part of an holistic approach to tackle this issue to make sure the regions are more liveable by Aboriginal people.

Are we using the right words?

The words used in the discussion paper are reasonable, although some may be general in nature. With further feedback and interactions from Aboriginal people the words will become sharpened and more precise towards the general goal of the strategy, reflecting the aspiration and the views of the Aboriginal people.

With no doubt it is okay to use ‘Aboriginal people’ as a reference term mostly, although in limited instances First Nations can be used as an alternative term of reference to the Aboriginal people. However, on whether first nations should be used entirely instead of Aboriginal people is an issue that the people themselves are to decide, as the right belongs to them.

What should we be thinking about?

It is important to note on the paper what principles or strategic elements were influenced by previous documentation and/or discussions, citing them in order to ensure that an understanding that community based discussions have occurred and that the document has taken Aboriginal voices into consideration. We are grateful for this strategy paper which is a

good step taken in starting this discussion, which by the end, have a tremendous positive effect in the socioeconomic growth of the Aboriginal people in Western Australia while at the same time strengthening and safeguarding their cultural identity and practices.