

Communique - Meeting No. 005/2019-2020

19 June 2020

The Aboriginal Advisory Council of WA (the Council) held Meeting No. 005 on Friday 19 June 2020 at Dumas House in West Perth.

Due to the COVID-19 travel and social distancing restrictions, some members joined the meeting via videoconference. The Co-Chairs, Ms Gail Beck and Mr Martin (Marty) Sibosado, chaired the meeting.

State Recovery Stakeholder Engagement Roundtable

In the morning, the Council participated in a State Recovery Stakeholder Engagement Roundtable hosted by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Hon Ben Wyatt MLA. The Roundtable discussed the positive and negative impacts of the pandemic on Aboriginal people and remote communities, and the challenges and opportunities for recovery.

The Minister for Health, Hon Roger Cook MLA, joined the Roundtable for a short time to brief members on the State Government's recent approval of a Future Health Research & Innovation Fund, and to invite Council's feedback on an appropriate name for the Fund.

The Minister for Environment, Hon Stephen Dawson MLC, also participated in the Roundtable and outlined the State Government's Plan for Our Parks and Aboriginal Ranger Program.

Key items discussed and considered by the Council included the following:

Aboriginal Advisory Council Communications Strategy

The Council is preparing a communication strategy to enable effective dissemination of information about Aboriginal affairs in Western Australia. While this will include information-sharing relating to COVID-19, the strategy will focus on the longer-term policy reform impacting on Aboriginal people.

Presentations by Agencies

A number of presentations were made to the Council, either providing information or seeking advice in relation to consultation with Aboriginal stakeholders as follows:

Complex Task Team for Remote Aboriginal Communities

In April 2020, the State Emergency Coordinator established a Complex Task Team (CTT) for Remote Aboriginal Communities within the State Pandemic Coordination Centre to provide a cross-agency mechanism for addressing the immediate risks and needs of remote Aboriginal communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Members provided valuable feedback to the CTT on issues facing Aboriginal communities because of the pandemic, noting overcrowding in housing, food security and price gouging in the regions to be of particular concern.

The Council agreed to establish a sub-committee to provide on-going advice and support to the CTT during the COVID-19 recovery phase.

Department of Justice - Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee

The Department of Justice presented to the Council on the establishment of an Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee (AJAC), which is proposed to provide culturally appropriate and considered advice on justice matters specific to the Department. Council members endorsed the proposal and offered their support.

Aboriginal Advisory Council of Western Australia

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Acknowledgement of Country

The Aboriginal Advisory Council of WA acknowledges the traditional custodians throughout Western Australia and their continuing connection to the land, waters and community. We pay our respects to all members of the Aboriginal communities and their cultures; and to Elders past, present and emerging.

Ombudsman Western Australia - Reportable Conduct Scheme for Western Australia

The office of the Western Australian Ombudsman gave a presentation on the planning and development of a Reportable Conduct Scheme for Western Australia. The Scheme will make an important contribution to protecting children from sexual and other abuse, and enhancing safe environments for vulnerable children in Western Australia.

Members noted the importance of adequate systems and processes to support victims in reporting abuse, however, raised some concern the scheme will not include mandatory reporting for sports clubs or scout groups.

The Council agreed to coordinate a formal response to the proposal to provide feedback and advice to the Ombudsman's Office.

Department of the Premier and Cabinet - National Agreement for Closing the Gap

The Department of the Premier and Cabinet provided an update to the Council on progress of the National Agreement for Closing the Gap. The new National Agreement replaces the previous National Indigenous Reform Agreement and aims to close the health and life expectancy gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous Australians.

Department of Communities - Specialist Child Protection Unit

The Council was invited to provide feedback on the establishment of a Specialist Child Protection Unit within the Department of Communities. The Unit aims to strengthen child protection expertise at the Department's senior leadership levels (Corporate Executive) and improve stewardship of the child protection system internally, and across the sector. The Unit will also drive improved outcomes for both children in care and their families, and those at risk of entering the system.

Members encouraged the Department of Communities to engage and consult at the community level during planning for the Unit to ensure it is culturally competent and reflective of community needs. Members further advised that learnings could be taken from previous successful initiatives, such as the Department of Child Protection's 'Strong Families' program.

Department of the Premier and Cabinet - Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy

The Department of the Premier and Cabinet provided the Council with an overview of feedback received during the public consultation period for the discussion paper *A Path Forward: Developing the Western Australian Government's Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy*.

The next meeting of the Council is scheduled for 22 and 23 July 2020.



Ms Gail Beck
Co-Chairperson

Mr Martin (Marty) Sibosado
Co-Chairperson

* Confidential agenda items were not included in this Communique.