



Aboriginal Water and Environmental Advisory Group Charter

1. Definitions

In this Terms of Reference Charter:

‘**Co-Chairs**’ means the Director General and the elected member as Co-Chairs.

“**AWEAG**” means the Aboriginal Water and Environmental Advisory Group.

“**Department**” means the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation.

“**Member**” means a member of the AWEAG.

“**Board**” means Aboriginal Empowerment Board.

2. Preamble

This charter sets out the role, responsibilities, structure and processes for the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (Department) Aboriginal Water and Environmental Advisory Group (Advisory Group).

The Department acknowledges the importance of a partnership management with Aboriginal people as the original custodians of WA. Aboriginal people have significant cultural knowledge and connection to Country, and living waters such as rivers, springs, soaks, jilas, and saltwater to protect and manage Western Australian's environment and water resources.

The Department recognises that Aboriginal people have been excluded from being able to practice obligations and customs around Country. This has affected the social-emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal people because they are restricted from being able to access, manage and protect Country.

The Department is determined to see changes at the Department to ensure a cultural lens is encompassed by Aboriginal knowledge, values and needs that contributes to shaping the Department's responsibilities for managing and regulating the State's environment and water resources.

3. Role and responsibilities

The role of the Advisory Group is to:

- provide strategic advice to the department to strive for **sustainable** water and environmental procedural **fairness and equity** for all;
- provide strategic advice, including feedback and analysis to the department on its strategies, programs and projects, as well as legislation and policy development;
- provide advice on opportunities and processes for engagement with Aboriginal people; and
- identify opportunities for the department and Aboriginal groups and communities to develop partnerships, including regional projects and programs.

The Advisory Group will achieve its roles by:

- developing and maintaining strong relationships between the department, members of the Advisory Group and the communities they represent;
- providing early input and advice on development of water and environmental legislation, regulations, policies and other legislative instruments, to safeguard Aboriginal peoples' rights to cultural, social, spiritual and economic wellbeing;
- supporting local water and environmental management projects, policies and planning;
- identifying future partnerships between the department and local Aboriginal groups, communities, corporations or businesses;
- contributing to the monitoring and evaluation of key projects, programs or policies; and
- an annual strategic planning session, including a forward agenda and identification of key risks and opportunities.

4. Composition and Membership

The Advisory Group will be comprised of up to 14 Aboriginal members - with a goal of gender balance from each region. The Advisory Group should, where possible, be made up of a diversity of representatives from the seven bioregions identified across Western Australia (Attachment 1).

Members have the skills, knowledge, and experience for:

- understanding the importance of water and environment in a cultural context;
- competency in relation to water and environmental policy, planning and management;
- effectiveness in engaging with Aboriginal communities;
- leadership and understanding of Cultural values that contribute to social, spiritual, and economic well-being

An expression of interest process will be undertaken to fill vacancies. A selection panel of Aboriginal Senior Leaders will consider applications and present recommendations to the Co-Chairs.

A person may be eligible for appointment to the Advisory Group if that person:

- Is an Aboriginal person living in Western Australia
- Is not an employee of DWER
- Does not have commitments that would conflict with the commitments of a member of the Advisory Group.

A person who is considered a public sector employee under the *Public Sector Management Act 1994* (WA) must have the prior permission of their employing authority before being appointed as a member of the Advisory Group.

It is acknowledged that individuals are representative of bioregions, and community with diverse and sometimes conflicting views, values and needs within local areas and between different regions around the state.

5. Appointment and Responsibilities of the Co-Chair

The Advisory Group is Co-Chaired by the Director General of the department, and an Aboriginal Co-Chair nominated by the Advisory Group.

The Co-Chair is selected from the Advisory Group's membership through a nomination process. Gender balance will be a consideration for Co-Chair appointment.

The responsibilities of the elected Co-Chair include:

- Playing a central role in formulating the Advisory Group's agenda, facilitating meetings, ensuring the active participation of all members, and taking on additional tasks as necessary;
- Foster positive and effective relations between the Advisory Group and the Department's Aboriginal Empowerment Board (Board) by actively participating in quarterly Board meetings;
- Collaborate with the Department's Director General Co-Chair for the Expression of Interest (EOI) campaign to assess and finalise EOI applications for membership.
- Represent the Advisory Group at other relevant forums as required.

The Co-Chair is elected for an initial three-year term or the duration of their existing term, with the possibility of re-election for an additional two-year term. Six months prior enabling nominees to shadow the outgoing Co-Chair.

The Co-Chair will be remunerated for their additional commitments according to the terms set out in the Department's Community Paid Participation in Engagement Activities Policy.

6. Term of Office

Members hold office for a term of up to four years, that includes a one-year pre-term induction period to transition new members into the Department. A member has the option to reapply, and cannot be appointed for more than two terms, whether consecutive or not.

A member may at any time resign from office by written notice given to the Director General. If members resign mid-term and a new member is appointed for the same region, the new member's term commences from the date of appointment by Co-Chairs.

The objective is to ensure continuity in the Advisory Group while also allowing turnover. The aim is that no more than fifty percent of members are replaced in any two-year period.

Where possible change over of members for a region should be staggered by 18 months between gender to ensure historical information is passed over smoothly.

A member will cease to be a member of the Advisory Group if they:

- Resign or retire from the Advisory Group.
- Pass away.
- Ceases to be eligible

7. Leave of Absence

The Department acknowledges that members will have leave of absences due to cultural responsibilities and protocols when a family member or a member of their community passes. The traditional customs followed during these times of mourning are known as 'Sorry Business'. These are cultural obligations which are prioritised over workplace commitments.

The Advisory Group has agreed that members are to have no more than two absences per year noting members capacity to attend meetings online.

- Members are to notify the Co-Chairs and Executive Support in writing four weeks prior to the meeting if they are absent to allow sufficient time for preparation. Absence or Apologies for Sorry business and Cultural matters can be determined via email or phone.

8. Ethical Standards and Duties

Code of Conduct – Each member shall abide by the terms of the Advisory Group’s Code of Conduct and is expected to uphold the ethical standards and corporate behaviour described in the Code of Conduct. Members will treat other members and observers with respect in a culturally safe space.

Members are not to speak to the media in their capacity as Advisory Group members. Members may receive confidential or sensitive information. All information received through the Advisory Group is to be treated as confidential unless otherwise specified.

Duties - The Advisory Group will operate in a manner reflecting the values of the Department and the Advisory Group. Endeavours to bring a broad perspective to the Advisory Group. The Advisory Group will endeavour to develop a consensual position on all issues.

Conflict of Interest - Each member shall declare personal, cultural, financial or other interests that may conflict or are perceived to conflict with their duty as a member of the Advisory Group. The Co-Chairs may request members to excuse themselves from discussions where the Co-Chairs consider that a conflict of interest cannot be managed (cultural responsibilities).

If any matter is or likely to be brought before the Advisory Group which could give rise to such a conflict of interest, then the member:

- a) Shall disclose this to the Advisory Group.
- b) Shall continue to receive meeting papers which relates to the matter, which is the subject of the conflict of interest, unless the Co-Chairs determines that they shall not receive any or all of those documents.
- c) Shall withdraw from any part of the meeting for the duration of that discussion.

9. Remuneration and Allowances

Members of the Advisory Group may be eligible for remuneration and other allowances.

Travel and accommodation costs for voluntary members to attend the Advisory Group meetings are covered by the Department.

Advisory Group members may be eligible for paid participation (in addition to reimbursements for travel expenses) according to the terms set out in the Department’s Community Paid Participation in Engagement Activities.

The Aboriginal Co-Chair member will be remunerated for their additional commitments according to the terms set out in the Department’s Community Paid Participation in Engagement Activities policy.

10. Meeting Procedures

The Advisory Group will meet a minimum of four (4) times per year. At discretion of the Co-Chairs, additional out-of-session meetings or discussions may be called upon as required for discussions to collaborate and revise documents via email and/or phone.

One meeting will be held in a regional location, to allow for on-Country opportunities and engagement with Traditional Owners and communities.

A quorum comprises Co-Chair and five members.

The Executive Support will set meeting dates in consultation with the Co-Chairs.

11. Administration

The Department's Aboriginal Engagement and Partnerships Branch is to provide Executive Support to the Advisory Group, managed by DWER's Senior Manager Aboriginal Engagement and Partnerships.

The Department will liaise with members and provide support to the Advisory Group to facilitate the preparation of meetings, including:

- Set future meeting dates and send out recurring calendar invites to members and key stakeholders (where required);
- coordinate and liaise with members to facilitate travel arrangements where required;
- liaise with members and key internal stakeholders to seek their considerations for the preparation of the agenda and submitted for endorsement by Co-Chairs;
- take minutes of each meeting, and record decisions and actions of the Advisory Group;
- provide minutes to members for review and comment to submit to the Co-Chairs for endorsement prior to next meeting;
- coordinate any follow-up actions as determined in the meeting.

12. Information Sharing

Information sharing will primarily occur through electronic mail (e-mail) communications and telephone. Other communication platforms include, AWEAG SharePoint, LinkedIn, and DWER's government external website.

An AWEAG Communique will be finalised following each meeting and approved by the Co-Chairs. The Communique will be provided to other DWER Advisory Groups for information-sharing purposes and members may wish to distribute it to relevant stakeholders.

AWEAG Communique will be shared on the Aboriginal Hub of the Department's intranet and DWER's government external webpage and AWEAG LinkedIn account.

Co-Chairs of AWEAG and the Committee of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Water Interests (the Committee) groups may collaborate and ensure key outcomes are achieved for the Department in the water and environmental sphere.

Sub-groups or 'think-tanks' can be established in agreement with the Advisory Group to focus on specific topics and report back to the Advisory Group.

13. Reporting

The Board's endorsed minutes will be tabled at the Advisory Group meetings for noting.

Endorsed minutes of the AWEAG meetings will be tabled at the Department's Aboriginal Empowerment Board for noting.

14. Review

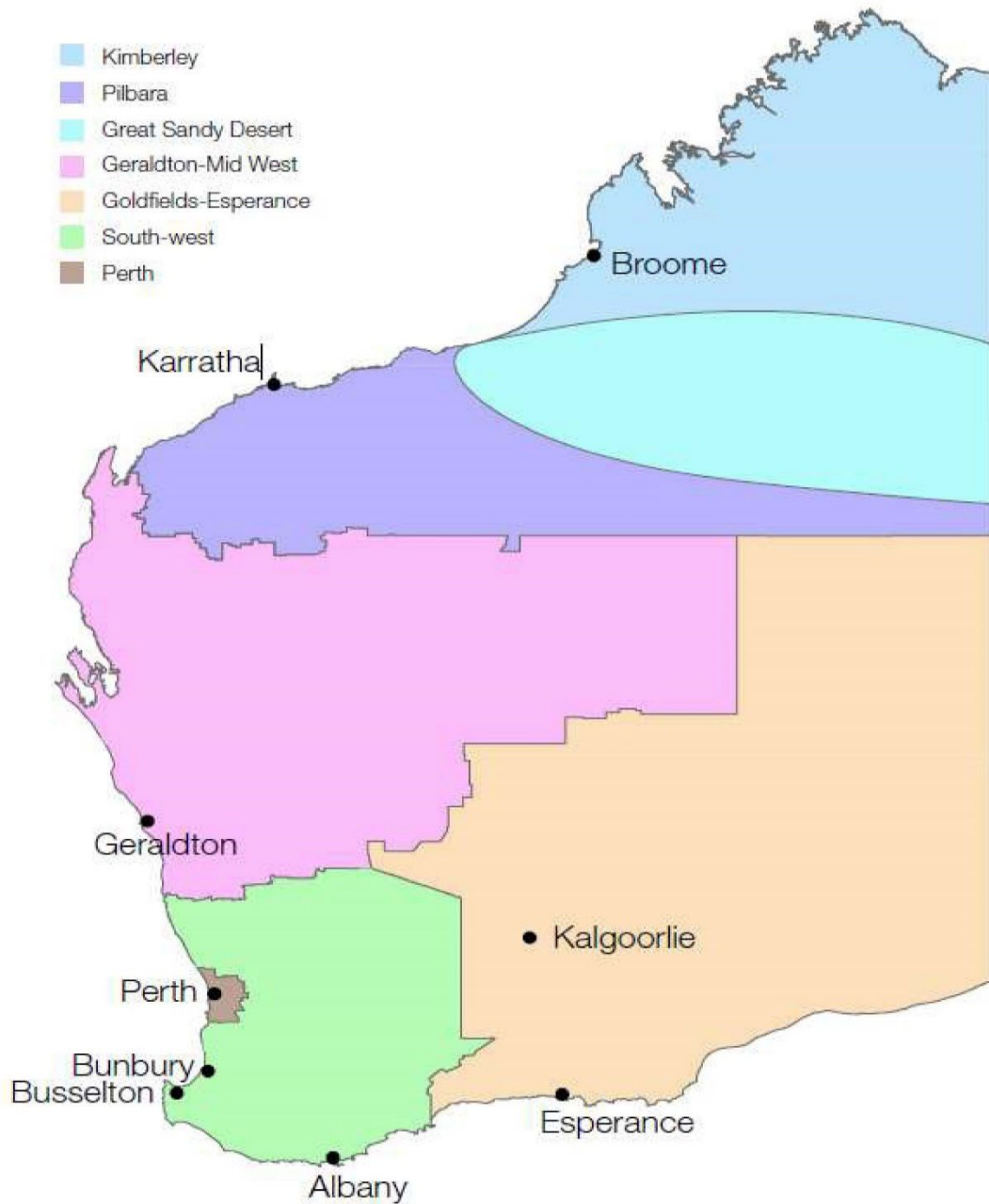
The Terms of Reference and performance of the Advisory Group will be reviewed in line with the corporate timelines and amended when necessary.

Endorsement Date: 21 February 2025

Review Date: 21 February 2027

AWEAG Representation Map

Attachment 1



These regions have been defined by DWER's internal mapping branch