



Communique – Meeting No. 18 – 12 March 2024

The Aboriginal Water and Environmental Advisory Group (AWEAG) held its 18th meeting on 12 March 2024 at the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER) Prime House office located in Joondalup. The meeting was Co-Chaired by Alistair Jones and Anthony Bellottie with additional support from Leanne Evans and included engagements with DWER and other Western Australian Government agencies.

The AWEAG conducted a strategic planning session the day before to collaborate and discuss strategic directions, identify key priorities and develop focus areas for the year.

The main items presented below are outcomes from the AWEAG meeting:

External Presentations

Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) – EPA Strategic Plan and *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972*

Lee McIntosh, Deputy Chair of the EPA, presented the promotion of Indigenous values and traditional knowledge in the EPA's environmental practices and policies, the EPA's management of the revised Aboriginal Heritage Act and how cultural heritage is considered in Environmental Impact Assessments.

Issues raised from members: limited resources for engaging with Traditional Owners regarding EPA matters and impacts on unregistered Aboriginal heritage sites and protection; members noted that Aboriginal Heritage sites are more than a place or a site.

Department of Premier and Cabinet – Vogel – McFerran Reforms

Chris Clarke, Deputy Director General of the Department of Premier and Cabinet, presented the changes to the EPA, including amendments to the *Environmental Protection Act 1986 (EPAct)* resulting from the Vogel-McFerran Review.

Pilbara Ranger Network and DWER Partnership Agreement

Clare Meredith, Manager Strategic Partnerships from the Pilbara Ranger Network (PRN), along with Melissa Pepper, Ranger Program Manager Karlka Nyuyaparli Aboriginal Corporation, presented an overview of the PRN and its partnership agreement with DWER. Melissa shared her reflections on the network's success.

Members discussed capacity-building opportunities within the PRN to share learnings. The administrative support required for this type of work is enormous. Members showed their support and willingness to remove barriers to further success.

Internal Presentations

Climate Adaptation Strategy – Adaptation Research Hub

James Duggie and Emily Gifford presented the Climate Adaptation Strategy to AWEAG, with a focus on empowering Aboriginal people's climate resilience through the Adaptation Research Hub. James discussed an Aboriginal engagement plan that includes workshops, a literature review, and engagement with advisory groups. Additionally, they plan to commission a literature review of adaptation research.

Members discussed including anthropologists in engagement and collaborating with Curtin's ARC Training Centre for Healing Country and continuing to work with universities. At times, there are missed employment opportunities for Traditional Owners (TOs) and ranger groups through research projects. Members acknowledged the great work done by the Climate Change team in engaging with AWEAG frequently and consistently.

WA Waste Strategy Review

Adrian Wiley, Director of Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery, presented an overview of the upcoming Waste Strategy with a focus on remote Aboriginal communities. The Strategy will soon be open for public consultation. The team will hold Aboriginal engagement workshops and hire a consultant to ensure the Strategy is inclusive and meets Aboriginal communities' unique needs.

Members suggested that the town of Warburton would be a suitable location to implement best practices. More specific work with communities can be done as part of the overall strategy and the importance of collaborating across government and with Prescribed Body Corporates.

Consultation Hydraulic Fracturing Regulations

Daniel Nevin and Melissa Lamb presented to AWEAG. Hydraulic fracturing is now allowed in limited circumstances in WA with forthcoming regulatory guidelines. Nevin and Lamb gave an overview of hydraulic fracturing in WA, including a brief history of regulation, areas where fracturing is prohibited (with an online map link), and the establishment of minimum standards for onshore fracturing. These standards will be discussed with stakeholders, including AWEAG.

Members discussed their disappointment that onshore fracturing is being allowed at all.

The next meeting is scheduled for 12 June 2024.

Mr Alistair Jones

Co-Chairperson

Aboriginal Water and Environmental Advisory Group

Mr Anthony Bellottie

Co-Chairperson

Aboriginal Water and Environmental Advisory Group

**Confidential agenda items are not included in the Communiqué*