

6 September 2018

Director, Aboriginal Policy Unit,  
Department of the Premier and Cabinet  
2 Havelock Street,  
WEST PERTH, WA 6005

**RE: RESPONSE TO THE “AN OFFICE FOR ADVOCACY AND  
ACCOUNTABILITY IN ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA –  
DISCUSSION PAPER – JUNE 2018”**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposal detailed in “An Office for Advocacy and Accountability in Aboriginal affairs in Western Australia – Discussion Paper – June 2018” (the Discussion Paper). We make this submission to you in response for consideration on behalf of the Pilbara Aboriginal Voice (*Kakurrka Muri*), or PAV.

As you are likely already aware, PAV was established following a resolution at the 2017 Annual On-Country Bush Meeting at Yule River. At this event, Traditional Owners from across the Pilbara region resolved that to more suitably advocate and improve outcomes for Pilbara Aboriginal people we needed a united approach. Hence, PAV comprises a diverse membership of Pilbara Aboriginal people, who have been nominated by the community at the Yule River meetings. Most importantly, our members include recognised Elders and community leaders from across the region who strengthen our voice with their cultural authority and invaluable knowledge. PAV is committed to working with government agencies (and other organisations) to ensure their policies and service delivery better meet the complex needs of our people.

Given the objectives of PAV, we are encouraged by the current proposal regarding the creation of an independent office to oversee what is happening in terms of Aboriginal affairs across Western Australia. However, while we support this concept in principle, following review of the Discussion Paper at a recent meeting, PAV members agreed to the below feedback.

*Function of the new office*

PAV agrees a coordinated approach is needed to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of government policies, service delivery and spending across all departments and agencies. Aboriginal people’s needs are not limited to the scope of single departments, and the interconnectedness of issues affecting us have not been adequately addressed due to the siloed nature of how government operates. Thus, striving for consistency across the whole-of-government is very much supported.

Further, while it is appreciated that duplicating the functions of other existing agencies is not ideal, we feel it appropriate that the office should provide a referral process to individuals

seeking such advice. To truly be an entity advocating for Aboriginal people, its role ought to involve assisting them with advice on who to contact regarding their concerns. This practice would also afford the office to maintain a record of such enquiries, which could assist it with determining problem areas within government requiring attention and/or improvement.

*Business of the new office*

PAV supports the proposal that the office should not be limited to State Government issues only, and that it should take a holistic view of how all levels of government are responsive (or not) to Aboriginal people's needs. Similarly, PAV agrees the scope of matters investigated by the office should not be narrow but instead should be determined and prioritised in consultation with Aboriginal people and their organisations. Again, this will assist in better addressing the complex, interconnected issues affecting Aboriginal people which span across both multiple departments and agencies and all levels of government.

*Structure and powers of the new office*

PAV agrees that the office should be a new entity, as opposed to an existing one, and that its functions and powers should be set out and enshrined in legislation. And, while we also strongly agree that appointed persons must be Aboriginal and from Western Australia, we recommend that two office holders – one male and one female, as per cultural protocols – share the responsibility of running the office. These persons must also possess a recognised level of cultural authority apposite to their responsibilities.

Further, we insist that an advisory group be established, which can help guide the office and its office holders in decision-making. This group must be representative of the various regions across the State and should comprise a mix of recognised community Elders and endorsed community leaders. This will afford the input from those Elders with the cultural authority to speak on behalf of their communities, as well as those who are being mentored into these roles. Such an arrangement would also allow for continuity and succession planning. PAV suggests four people from each region be invited to sit on the advisory group – one male Elder, one male community leader, one female Elder, and one female community leader. Members of this advisory group would be responsible for consulting their communities and raising concerns and ideas through this forum to the office and office holders, as well as reporting back to their communities.

With the input of this advisory group, PAV also agrees that the office should be accountable to and able to table reports in Parliament, and operate independently of any Ministers; a mechanism, such as a Steering Committee, would be appropriate. The office should not be subject to Ministerial directions; however, we accept that the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs may, from time to time, refer specific matters to the office.

The office should be delegated powers to obtain information and access documents to fulfil its obligations as required; while a process for how the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs can reasonably request information from the office should be defined. This is commensurate with our desire for government and the office itself to be equally transparent and held accountable to the Aboriginal people they represent.

## An office for advocacy and accountability in Aboriginal affairs – Submission

Submission from: Pilbara Aboriginal Voice

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PAV feels the proposed term of office of five years with the possibility of reappointment seems practical. It is felt this would be of some benefit in regards to stability and continuity. However, those in office must be held responsible for delivering on key performance indicators – perhaps as determined in consultation with the suggested advisory group.

### Name of the new office

PAV does not have a specific preference for what the office should be named. However, given the suggestions listed in the Discussion Paper, we do feel inclusion of the term ‘Aboriginal’ is most appropriate for Western Australia. Further, the name should be inclusive and reflect the broad diversity of Aboriginal people and language groups from across the State.

### Appointment process

PAV concurs Aboriginal people must have input as to who is appointed to be the office holders. Therefore, it is our recommendation that the suggested advisory group be established prior to any appointments. This group can then assist in the evaluation of potential candidates and provide guidance regarding who is ultimately selected.

On behalf of PAV, we thank you again for this opportunity to provide our feedback on the current proposal. We certainly look forward to contributing further and seeing what comes of this very important initiative.

Yours sincerely,

(sent on behalf of)

Daniel Brown and Linda Doogiebee-Dridi,  
PAV Co-Chairs