



Aarnja^{Ltd}

The Regional Body for Kimberley Aboriginal people...

7 September 2018

Department of the Premier and Cabinet

Dumas House

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Aarnja's Public Submission in response to the: Discussion Paper – An office for advocacy and accountability in Aboriginal affairs in Western Australia

1. Aarnja is the Kimberley Regional Body established following the Browse Gas negotiations. Aarnja was to distribute the regional benefits and administer the Trusts which have, to date, not eventuated following the move to process LNG offshore rather than on the Coast.
2. Aarnja is also the West Kimberley Empowered Communities Backbone organisation. Aarnja works in collaboration with similar Empowered Communities backbone organisations and Aboriginal leaders located in eight other diverse regions from around Australia including those from Western Australia's East Kimberley and Ngaanyatjarra regions.
3. Each of our regions has a long history of leadership and advocacy for changes that provide a far better system—one that replaces the current top-down system of control and dependence, with processes and structures that empower decision-making at the grassroots level, and that also enable us to partner with government at the regional, and national, levels as is required.
4. We firmly believe that substantive reform is a crucial part of the structural reforms that are needed to galvanize and enable empowerment, responsibility and self-determination for Aboriginal people. It is only when our people are empowered to take charge of our own lives and make decisions about our own communities that we will close the gap. This cannot be a short-term policy trend. It needs to be a permanent structural shift.
5. Aarnja supports and endorses the Uluru Statement from the Heart as an act of unprecedented Indigenous consensus, and an historic act of self-determination by our people. Indigenous Australians have told government how we want to be constitutionally recognised. The Uluru Statement modestly asked for a constitutionally enshrined First Nations voice, so our communities can have a guaranteed say in the laws and policies made about us. It also asked for a Makarrata Commission to supervise agreement-



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making and truth-telling, to be set up in legislation. These two proposed reforms, along with an extra-constitutional Declaration as proposed by the Referendum Council, would complement, enhance and connect to the Empowered Communities reforms we have already proposed.

6. We have always maintained that structural reform needs to be part of the picture. We have always said, too, that constitutional reform needs to be part of the picture. Kimberley Futures is the Empowered Communities framework aims to empower our people with a voice at the local and regional levels, so that more productive partnerships with government can be created. Constitutional reform can sensibly connect these local and regional voices to law and policy making at the federal level, so we can have a voice at the national level as well.
7. The new office proposed by the State Government seems to be a dilution of the voices of Aboriginal people in the State. Establishing a single point of contact based over 2,000kms from the Kimberley is prohibitive to securing regional partnerships and decision making which is being offered through Aboriginal led processes and Kimberley Futures.
8. At a local level in the Kimberley, we propose that any new Independent Office for Aboriginal Affairs in Western Australia work closely with Aarnja and engage with Aboriginal people through the Kimberley Futures regional governance structures being established throughout 2018/19.
9. We further suggest the Western Australian Government and any future Independent Office use all means available to advocate for the Australian Government to bring to life the Uluru statement through a national referendum and changes to the Australian Constitution.

Yours sincerely,

Maureen O'Meara
CEO Aarnja Ltd