



## Social Reinvestment WA Response to the Government of Western Australia's Discussion Paper: "An Office for advocacy and accountability in Aboriginal affairs in Western Australia."

7<sup>th</sup> September, 2018.

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Social Reinvestment WA welcomes the proposal for a new independent office for accountability and advocacy in Aboriginal Affairs. As recognized in the discussion paper, Aboriginal people in Western Australia have experienced a lack of representation of their voices and issues at decision making level of government since colonization, which has contributed to poorer life outcomes and systemic discrimination against Aboriginal people.

We thoroughly support the suggestions for improvement of government support to Aboriginal people through better coordination across agencies and levels of government; better policy implementation and more customer focused service delivery; stronger, more systematic engagement with Aboriginal people; and more effective and coordinated use of data.

A dedicated, independent voice for Aboriginal people to Parliament, that is supported through adequate resourcing, strong community engagement mechanisms, and genuine commitment to change across government will help support better outcomes for Aboriginal people in WA.

1. *What are your views about this outline of the Offices basic features? Does it miss anything important? Is anything included that shouldn't be?*

We support the suggested basic features of the office, and the recommended powers or parliamentary privilege, but are wary of tokenism. It is imperative that along with the installation of this new office, there is a genuine commitment across government to the position to advance change, as well as to foster relationships and partnerships between the government and community. We believe the office should be a conduit between Parliament and the Aboriginal community to ensure ongoing dialogue.

Mechanisms for meaningful community engagement and representation will be essential for this role to be effective. We acknowledge that we are limited by the diversity of voices, vast geographical distances, and lack of democratically chosen or recognized regional spokespersons in the WA Aboriginal community. It is therefore critical that the WA government build local and regional capacity mechanisms and voices, and trust in culturally secure and democratic processes for governance, decision making participation, and consultation. This could be a function of the Office if resourced, or otherwise should form part of the broader government architecture to advance Aboriginal affairs.

The effectiveness of the Office will rely on how it builds and maintains the trust of the many groups and individual members of WA's Aboriginal community; And the methods it uses to consult Aboriginal people. We believe an emphasis on co-design, co-production, co-evaluation of initiatives and services, and developing mechanisms for local leadership formation and reporting are imperative to maintaining trust, building relationships, and delivering effective and efficient outcomes for the community.

The office ideally should be supported by whole of government strategies in key areas of change needed for Aboriginal people to ensure coordination and accountability across all levels of government. An area



of particular importance to our Coalition and Aboriginal people that requires this level of coordination would be justice and incarceration. We are supportive of the Office being able to recommend the initiation of such strategies to Parliament, and of the Office monitoring relevant strategies.

2. *What should be the formal name of the office?*

Our suggested name is the 'Western Australian Commissioner for Aboriginal Affairs.'

3. *How should Aboriginal people and organisations be involved in the appointment of the office holder? Who should be involved?*

We understand the challenges in attaining representation from all sectors of the community in the appointment process.

We suggest the selection process should involve a mix of Aboriginal people from the Community through the already established Aboriginal Advisory Council with Aboriginal Affairs, and other existing regional bodies, with an aim for the Office to support the development and build capacity for stronger, democratic regional mechanisms, which can then inform future selections through better community representation.

Whilst the discussion paper suggests a single individual as an office holder, we recommend the appointment of a female and male Commissioner to work together would better support equal representation. Members of the Aboriginal community have voiced concerns that historically women's and children/young people's interests have been disregarded, in favour of strong focuses on Native Title, mining and land and men's issues.

Critically, it needs to be a fair and transparent process of selection. The process should allow periods for community to respond to nominations, and lodge grievances or support to the selection committee.

Social Reinvestment WA appreciate the effort and thought that have clearly gone into developing this concept by government. We look forward to seeing this process develop further, and are keen to continue engaging and supporting the development of an Office for advocacy and accountability in Aboriginal affairs in Western Australia.

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*Social Reinvestment WA (SRWA) is a coalition of not-for-profits working towards an innovative vision of justice in Western Australia. We develop alternatives and solutions to injustices, and advocate for reforms that ultimately promote Smart Justice, Healthy Families, Safe Communities for all Western Australians through a Social Reinvestment approach.*

*We are co-chaired by Daniel Morrison and Glenda Kickett, and our current members are Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia, Bringing Them Home WA/ Yokai, Save the Children Australia, White Lion, Amnesty Int., Dr Sarah Murray (UWA), Helen Creed, CPSU/CSA, Community Legal Service Association WA, Connect Groups, MercyCare, NAIDOC Perth, Outcare Inc., Oxfam, Reconciliation WA, Uniting Church in WA, UnitingCare West, WACOSS, WANADA, Wungening Aboriginal Corp., YACWA.*

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