

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

Submission from: Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation

Date Received: 07/09/2018

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The Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation (**JTSI**) is supportive of the proposal by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs to create an office that has the specific purpose of strengthening government accountability in Aboriginal affairs.

JTSI agrees that there is a need for greater accountability and advocacy in Aboriginal affairs in order to create a policy environment that is conducive to the improved social, economic, cultural and health outcomes for Aboriginal Western Australians. This aligns with the findings of the 2017 Service Priority Review, which identified a need for greater accountability and transparency in the design and delivery of government services so that community needs are better met.

The Discussion Paper notes that there several statutory and political institutions that act as institutions of accountability. These include the electoral system, Parliamentary committees, the Opposition, the Ombudsman, the Office of Auditor General, the Inspector of Custodial Services, the Aboriginal Affairs Advisory Council, and the Commissioner for Children and Young People.

The Discussion Paper also noted the key role that Aboriginal Non-Government Organisations play in service delivery, policy advocacy and in Aboriginal community development. These organisations, however, have significant workloads, and are not in a position to advocate for the interests of Aboriginal Western Australians at a system-wide scale. Nonetheless, an office for advocacy and accountability in Aboriginal affairs in Western Australia would need to build strong relationships with this sector.

A key reason in support of establishing this office for advocacy and accountability in Aboriginal affairs is that of the existing institutions of accountability, whilst some are independent of government, some have statutory power, and some have a specific focus on aboriginal issues, none have a focus on all three. For this reason, the creation of an office with a specific focus on promoting accountability in Aboriginal affairs and advocating for the interests of Aboriginal Western Australians fills a critical gap in the institutional accountability framework.

In terms of the specifics of the office, JTSI believes that:

1. The creation of the office should include the appointment of a person with special legal powers to ensure that the Western Australian Government is accountable in the way that it works for the interests of Aboriginal Western Australians.
2. The name of the office should be chosen to promote the greatest access and profile
3. The office should be properly resourced so that it can conduct the following roles:
  - Conduct assessments into relevant areas that are not covered by other agencies,
  - Prepare reports and submissions,
  - Engage rigorously and regularly with other levels of government,
  - Monitor the outcomes of programs and policies designed for Aboriginal people,
  - Establish a media presence.

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4. Whilst independence is critical to the role of the office, the office must be capable of building strong relationships, in particular with Aboriginal NGOs and different levels and areas of government.