



BADGEBUP ABORIGINAL CORPORATION
Box 3110 Katanning- Nyabing Road, Badgebup WA 6317

5th September 2018

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

Dear Sir

Submission on the Discussion Paper: An Office for advocacy and accountability in Aboriginal Affairs in Western Australia

We welcome the opportunity to provide comment on the proposed “Accountability and Advocacy Office” and thank you for the opportunity to be involved in the process.

The Badgebup Aboriginal Corporation (BAC) was established in 2006 and is a member-based not-for-profit Aboriginal Corporation located in the Great Southern Region of Western Australia. The Central Great Southern Region spans the town sites of Katanning, Gnowangerup, Tambellup, Kojonup, Nyabing, Woodanilling and Broomehill and is rich in Aboriginal Heritage and Traditions.



The BAC has been driving the agenda for change in the central Great Southern region in consultation with the Aboriginal communities of Katanning, Tambellup, Gnowangerup and Kojonup, following the release of the 2012 Great Southern Health profile.

The Report identified Katanning and Tambellup as having some of the lowest Socio-Economic Indexes For Areas (SEIFA) scores across Australia and recommended that funding and new

programs be directed to these towns, which resulted in Katanning becoming a priority area for all levels of Government.

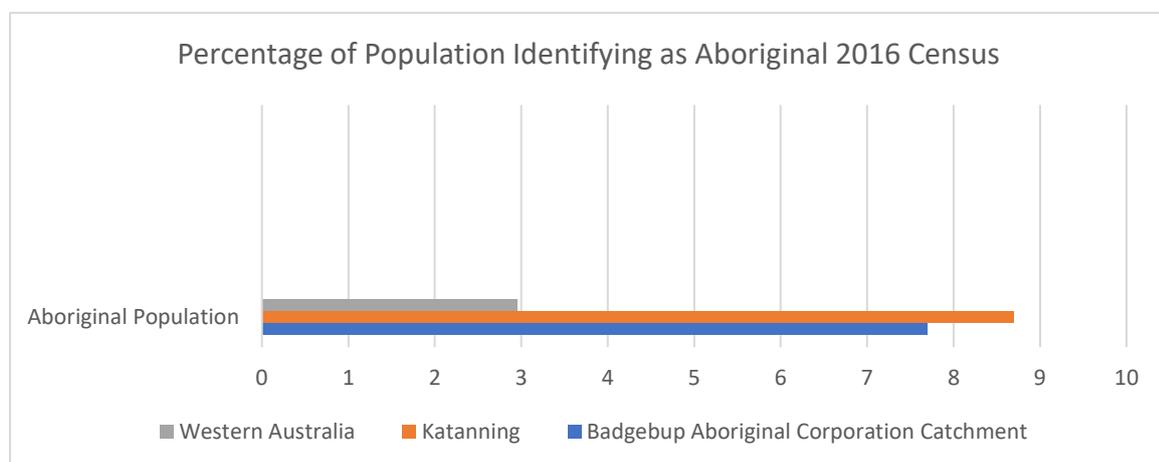
Badgebup, which is centrally located within the central Great Southern region, has a rich cultural significance among the region's Aboriginal residents, has become a focal point for ideas aimed at addressing a range of economic and social disadvantages that have become increasingly prominent in recent years.

The BAC adopted a collaborative approach to community engagement to address the socio-economic disadvantage in Aboriginal communities of the central Great Southern region, including stakeholder buy-in into the development of community initiatives and ensured a combined responsibility for positive outcomes. The Katanning Community Engagement, Governance and Leadership Group (KCEGLG), was founded in 2014 following the community engagement and consultation process.

As an advocate for the Aboriginal communities in the central Great Southern, the BAC therefore makes the following comments on behalf of our members and the Aboriginal communities in which we live and work. These comments are provided with a deep understanding of living experiences in Aboriginal communities, and the identified barriers and constraints that still exist in this country, which inhibit any real major change or improvement in the lives of Aboriginal communities and their families.

The Central Great Southern Context

The Central Great Southern area has more than two and a half times the proportion of community members identifying as Aboriginal than the Western Australian average. The central town within this catchment, Katanning, has around three times the proportion of Aboriginal people as the State average.



Regretfully, the Central Great Southern Region's Aboriginal population experiences significantly higher overall levels of disadvantage in terms of socio-economic status than the population as a whole. The region's Aboriginal population is more likely to be unemployed, underemployed or not in the workforce compared to non-Aboriginal residents. Aboriginal children are significantly less likely to attend school or receive the medical attention they deserve. These challenges have been exacerbated by long term welfare dependency, high crime rates, drug use and a range of community, cultural and health related issues.

These outcomes cannot be seen in isolation but as the culmination of many years of inadequate service provision coupled with cultural dislocation (and associated intergenerational trauma) from past government policy decisions and practices that have adversely impacted on Aboriginal individuals and community cohesion.

One of the first barriers BAC identified in our local communities was a lack of mainstream understanding of the significant disadvantage both socially and economically being experienced by Aboriginal people and their families in regional and remote areas. To highlight the proportion of disadvantage, we utilised data from the Great Southern Health Profile, which ultimately resulted in increased services and several new programs being funded in Katanning and the Great Southern region by the Federal Government.

Functions of the New Office

The modest “*Closing the Gap*” improvements in outcomes in areas of education and health, shows a slow progress being made, across all building blocks and is testament to well-intentioned initiatives that have failed to deliver long-lasting tangible outcomes for Aboriginal people and their communities.

Therefore, we commend the Western Australian Government for its initiative in establishing an Office for Advocacy and Accountability for Aboriginal Affairs. We caution however, that this Office must learn the lessons of past attempts to change the status quo, and must be sufficiently resourced so as to truly fulfil its charter. We believe that a sufficiently well-resourced Office has the potential to make a real difference to the understanding of not only ‘what’ is happening at a grass root level, but have the ability to understand ‘why’ and thus advocate for meaningful changes.

The BAC firmly agree that an accountability gap exists in the State’s institutional framework and the failure of the Closing the Gaps strategy to positively improve the outcomes of Aboriginals is evidence of this. We believe that the Office has the potential to fulfil this role and also agree that the Office must be independent of Government departments and independent of the Government of the day and have the interests and priorities of the Aboriginal people as its sole focus. Measurement and evaluation will be an important input to policy debate and the Office **must** be provided with sufficient resources to enable it to undertake these tasks.

The BAC agrees that the Office must be enabled with the powers to seek information in order to hold organisations utilising public funds for the benefit of Aboriginal people to account. There should be an increased focus on outcomes measurement and an increased ability to listen to Aboriginal people who often have meaningful insights on how to engage effectively with the Aboriginal community, but are many times ignored or disregarded.

We also strongly support the Office’s charter of working for system wide change, including scope to refer or recommend particular matters to other investigative bodies such as the Office of the Auditor General. Referral arrangements will be important, going forward, to develop a more trusting relationship with Aboriginal people who may be reluctant to discuss sensitive and personal information. We are not suggesting that the Office ought to take responsibility for the resolution of all matters, however having a mechanism for referral (written advice to the relevant Aboriginal groups as to where the matter has been referred so that they can make appropriate follow up) would be valuable.

In relation to the structure and powers of the new Office, the BAC agrees with the basic features listed under these headings in the Discussion paper. The majority of the powers listed are inclusive and we do not believe anything has been included that shouldn’t be. We do however believe that value could be added to prospects for community reconciliation and the health and wellbeing of the whole community (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike) if the

Office incorporated the impact of cultural misunderstandings and cultural disconnect in its charter. It is our belief that the success of 'on the ground' services are frequently inhibited due the absence of a cultural overlay. Greater transparency and discussion around these elements in the work of the Office is likely to lead to a greater understanding not just by policy makers, but by the community at large.

The BAC is really encouraged that the Office will provide a focus point for Aboriginal people to communicate to Government in regards to structural issues of disadvantage, including monitoring and evaluating data and information to explore the effectiveness of government funded policies and programs. A dedicated Office with structural 'authority', we believe, will empower Aboriginal people to develop workable solutions across the tiers of government.

Name of the New Office

The BAC's preference is for a name such as "Advocate for Aboriginal people" as Western Australia has a diverse range of Aboriginal languages and consideration must be given to some groups that don't speak English as a first language. In our experience all Aboriginal people within WA understand the meaning of "Aboriginal" and whilst they might not know the meaning of "Advocate" without proper explanation, they will have no trouble identifying that the position is about something to do with them.

Appointment Process

The BAC commends your endeavour to provide Aboriginal people and organisations a role in the appointment process for the new office. It is our belief that the success of the Office will hinge in large part, on the selection of an Aboriginal person that understands not just the Aboriginal context, but also the workings of Government including a good understanding of government policies and procedures.

There are several existing avenues for Aboriginal people to elect representatives. Every area is represented by a legal entity such as a Aboriginal Land and Sea Council The SWALSC are now in the process of setting up new Body Corporates in Noongar country through the Noongar Native Title Settlement deal with the Western Australian Government to allow Noongar people to elect representatives for local areas.

Our preference is for the holder of this Office to be independently recruited, based on their skill set, knowledge of government, experiences and aptitude for the role. The appointment should be skills based and independent of family relationships. The connection between the Office holder and established organisations throughout the State should provide enough connectivity to the Aboriginal community without compromising the specific professional skill set required for this position.

The BAC believes that there are many Aboriginal people within Western Australia that would have a professional background that would suit the role of the Office and so are confident that a skill and experience based selection process would yield suitable candidates. Once a suitable candidate has been selected, it will be important for him/her to establish mechanisms for ongoing engagement with Aboriginal communities whether they be urban, rural, regional or remote and take a collaborative approach in the identification of priority issues.

We would like to commend your intent to establish an Office for Aboriginal People and we once again reiterate our request that the Office be sufficiently resourced to enable it to effectively connect to the Aboriginal community voice of the Peoples.

The BAC values the opportunity to make this submission and we wish you all the best in your endeavour to establish the new Office. If you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact our Project and Partnership Manager, Julie Hayden on 04279992910.

Yours sincerely,

Johnny Rodd

Johnny Rodd
Chairperson
Badgebup Aboriginal Corporation