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**Kuruma Marthudunera Aboriginal Corporation – Response to Discussion Paper; An office for advocacy and accountability in Aboriginal affairs in Western Australia.**

Dear Director,

Kuruma Marthudunera Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC (KMAC) welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the Western Australian Government's Discussion Paper, outlining a proposal for a new office for accountability and advocacy in Aboriginal affairs.

KMAC was established as a corporate entity for the Robe River Kuruma (formerly Kuruma and Marthudunera) people (RRK). The RRK people have traditional rights to an area covering nearly 16,000 square kilometres in the Pilbara region of Western Australia, and KMAC is the Prescribed Body Corporate for the Part A and Part B Kuruma Marthudunera Native Title Determination areas covering nearly 10, 000 square kilometres. The RRK traditional lands lie within the Shire of Ashburton and comprise part of the Fortescue River and the complete river system of the Robe River, in the most westerly part of the Hamersley Range. KMAC has a pivotal role in progressing the broader interests of approximately 300 RRK people and in representing the RRK people in their dealings with government and the private sector.

KMAC acknowledges the Discussion Paper's frank recognition that government is not serving Aboriginal people as well as it should. The findings of the State Government's Service Priority Review stressed the systemic barriers which obstruct the achievement of effective positive change for Aboriginal people and communities in Western Australia, resulting in continuing poor social and economic outcomes. As a Pilbara-based regional organisation, we observe socio-economic and health outcomes particularly have not improved, in large part due to the lack of transparency and effectiveness of services which need to be informed by and tailored to Aboriginal people.

KMAC's ongoing position is that accountability for these outcomes is not possible without genuine and consistent engagement from government and the public sector with Aboriginal people, communities, and the Aboriginal organisations elected to represent them. KMAC is supportive of the establishment of a new office for accountability and advocacy, but reiterates that the success of this office will only come from systematic engagement with Aboriginal people, and with clear channels of communication between the office and Aboriginal people to ensure that Aboriginal people's interests, issues and concerns are heard, and reflected in policy implementation and service delivery.

KMAC provides the following response to the questions outlined in the discussion paper;



1. What are your views about this outlines of the office's basic features? Does it miss anything important? Is anything included that shouldn't be?
  - The proposed office function is very broad. Whilst KMAC agrees that system level advocacy across government activities affecting Aboriginal people is required, it is KMAC's opinion that accountability is key to office success. The role of the office must be focused on specific outcomes, with transparent performance indicators established, a clear and meaningful reporting mechanism mandated, and clear timelines, in order to measure effectiveness.
  - KMAC's view is that a focus on identifying opportunities to improve services with collaborative input from Aboriginal corporations is critical. One of KMAC's key programs is our Member Support Program which aims to reduce forms of hardship for the RRK people and was formed in response to member necessity for basic human needs including health and relief from poverty. The Member Support Program can currently offer assistance in the areas of health, lore and culture, education, support for the elderly and relief of poverty. It is KMAC's opinion that the necessity for this program is a clear shortcoming of the role of government in successfully providing these services. Further, this program fills a void in the short-term, is unsustainable and requires a more immediate focus of government service providers to alleviate medium to long-term barriers to accessing such services. This substitute role of Aboriginal Trusts and corporations needs to shift and reflect a broader and more sustainable focus of advocacy and connection to government services. Government providers should reconsider such roles as an opportunity to support them in successfully undertaking their role in service delivery to this disadvantaged section of the community.
  - KMAC also provides advocacy and personal support to RRK people, including representation to improve service access and address issues with government agencies and other providers. KMAC has increasingly found RRK people accessing health and wellbeing support through our programs as they find government services difficult to navigate, unsupportive and slow to respond. Further to this we are witness to a prevailing attitude from government services providers towards Aboriginal people in the Pilbara that they should be more reliant on Aboriginal corporations due to mining royalties. KMAC reiterates that it is not the role of Aboriginal corporations to fulfil the obligations of government service agencies and service providers.
  - KMAC also sees a key role of the office will be to ensure government agencies engage better with Aboriginal people, and Aboriginal organisations able to better engage with government. The office will need to ensure a mechanism is in place to ensure that the Aboriginal voice is heard and that this voice is legitimate, representative, and unified.
  - KMAC agrees that the office should develop its priority areas in collaboration with Aboriginal organisations, government agencies, and other non-government organisations, but reiterates the requirement for outcomes based, transparent and focused performance indicators.
  - KMAC is supportive of the proposed structures and powers of the new office, but encourages Government to ensure that the office is resourced sufficiently to provide long term, sustainable, and meaningful outcomes across all regions in Western Australia, and has the capacity to implement reform rather than simply regurgitating ongoing issues that are already long identified.

2. What should be the formal name of the office?
  - KMAC supports the Discussion Paper's position that the name of the office should be determined in consultation with Aboriginal people.
  - KMAC encourages further consultation on a regional level by Government to disseminate the outcomes of this Discussion Paper, and to identify a name that works best for Aboriginal people.
  
3. How should Aboriginal people and organisations be involved in the appointment process for the office-holder? Who should be involved?
  - KMAC recommends that as part of this process, representative panels are established across regional areas. Aboriginal corporations and Aboriginal community organisations local to each region could nominate members to sit on the panel. These panels could then develop a process to appoint the office-holder, and a process for engagement on a regional level, acknowledging that regional issues are unique to each region and can vary from metropolitan areas with greater service delivery.

To support the legitimacy of such an office, KMAC respectfully strongly advocates for a second phase of consultation informed by the outcomes of the Discussion Paper response. KMAC welcomes an opportunity to further engage with Government to share ways in which RRK people see the system working in a more meaningful and outcomes focused way for Aboriginal people across Western Australia, but particularly through the lens of our experience of the Pilbara.

We invite Minister Ben Wyatt to connect with KMAC's Management team to provide an update on a second phase of consultation, and further extend an invitation to Minister Wyatt or his representative to our Annual General Meeting on the 30<sup>th</sup> November 2018 to consult with our community directly and provide an update on the proposal.

Yours sincerely,



Sara Slattery  
Chair, Kuruma Marthudunera Aboriginal Corporation