



7 September 2018

Mr Darren Foster
Director General
Department of the Premier and Cabinet
Locked Bag 3001
WEST PERTH WA 6872

Our ref: MRA-0062/A571560
Your ref: D1709824



Dear Mr Foster

DISCUSSION PAPER – AN OFFICE FOR ADVOCACY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Thank you for your correspondence dated 2 July 2018 regarding the establishment of an Office for Advocacy and Accountability of Aboriginal Affairs in Western Australia. The Metropolitan Redevelopment Authority (MRA) is supportive of any such proposal designed to improve the way government works with and for Aboriginal Western Australians.

Introduction and Background

Over the past four years, the MRA has established strong collaborative working relationships with the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council, the Whadjuk Working Party and Reconciliation Western Australia. Our willingness to engage with Aboriginal people, to listen to their stories and incorporate Whadjuk culture in urban redevelopment has resulted in some great innovation and we believe walked new ground towards reconciliation with the Whadjuk people.

The MRA signed a Cultural Compact with the Whadjuk Working Party in May 2017; the culmination of more than three years of collaboration that led to the development of Kaart Kort Waarning (Head Heart Talking). Created in partnership with Dr Richard Walley OAM, Kaart Kort Waarning is a bespoke framework for cultural engagement that maps the Noongar six seasons against the traditional model for project delivery. Through this framework, the MRA has been able to deliver places that appropriately reflect Whadjuk culture, heritage and past uses of our city.

It has been a great privilege to incorporate that history and culture throughout the public realm of Elizabeth Quay, along the revamped Scarborough beachfront and in the design of Yagan Square. Our collaboration with the Whadjuk Working Party and Reconciliation WA continues with a focus on engaging the broader Western Australian community and visitors to Perth with the cultural narratives that are infused throughout the design of Yagan Square, and celebrating the precinct as a beacon of reconciliation.

Function of the New Office

The MRA believes that the appointment of a dedicated public service officer, supported by the appropriate legislative powers, will drive innovation across the public service and help build positive partnerships to the benefit of Aboriginal Western Australians. It should also provide for greater collaboration and alignment with other State and Territory advocates to influence Federal policy and harness lessons learned across a wide range of issues.

The combination of advocacy and accountability functions would ensure that initiatives across the public service do not lose momentum. It will provide for more transparent reporting across the Government system and draw greater attention to Aboriginal culture and the broad range of successful initiatives in health, education and housing that are too often overshadowed in public discourse. A Government leader of this stature and profile would also provide invaluable support and influence to other Government entities, non-Government organisations and community groups who are working tirelessly to achieve positive outcomes for Aboriginal people.

A primary focus for the office on advocacy will drive innovation and collaboration, fostering a deeper understanding of Aboriginal culture across Government and resulting in improved outcomes. This could be reinforced through regular monitoring and reporting, and celebrated through public communications.

Business of the New Office

The MRA supports a broad remit for the office, across all levels of Government, with priority areas to be identified in collaboration with stakeholders.

Since the development of Kaart Kort Waarnging, the framework has been acknowledged as a finalist in the 2016 Premier's Awards for Excellence in Public Service for improving Aboriginal outcomes, and has been increasingly utilised across Government, through other major infrastructure projects and programs.

As you are aware, the MRA is in the process of merging with LandCorp as part of the Government's Land Agency Reform agenda. The new organisation is committed to continuing the intent of the Kaart Kort Waarnging framework and is currently considering how it could be applied across the State.

I would be very keen to understand what interest and opportunities there would be between the cultural engagement framework, Yagan Square and a dedicated office for advocacy and accountability in Aboriginal affairs. As with all redevelopment areas, the MRA is tasked with identifying the long-term governance and ownership structures for its assets, within which the cultural engagement framework will require a new owner within Government to ensure that the spirit of the collaboration, and the trust provided by the Whadjuk Working Party, is not devalued in interpretation and application.

Structure and Powers of the New Office

While the MRA is appreciative of the complexities of providing a legislative framework, we believe it is key to affording the new office the independence and stature that is envisioned. All other proposals for the structure of the office are also supported.

Name of the New Office

The MRA would be supportive of a culturally appropriate term for the name of the office as use of that language would make the office instantly recognisable and would help to build a deeper understanding, respect and acknowledgement of Aboriginal culture. Consideration of the process under which this name would be chosen will be key to ensuring identification of a term that would be universally supported.

Appointment Process

As background, the Kaart Kort Waarnging framework prescribes that the Whadjuk Working Party works with each family group to agree nominated representatives as the primary points of contact for communication and engagement. Their role and collaboration is then supported by meetings with the full membership of the Whadjuk Working Party at significant milestones. This process has worked well in practise, acknowledging that this process works primarily with only one representative Aboriginal group, however the approach of requesting nominated representatives could be beneficial for engagement with the appointment process.

Conclusion

I would like to reiterate the MRA's support for the establishment of a dedicated unit within the Western Australian public service that can advocate for broader consideration of Aboriginal culture, and ensure that the accountability of Government to appropriately represent the views and rights of Aboriginal people.

Should the proposal receive support, I look forward to future dialogue about how the MRA can work with the new Office for Advocacy and Accountability in Aboriginal Affairs in Western Australia, and would welcome the opportunity to share our experiences to date wherever it can be of benefit.

Yours sincerely



Sean Henriques
A/Chief Executive Officer