



Response to Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC)

Re: An office for advocacy and accountability in Aboriginal affairs in Western Australia – discussion paper (June 2018)

Introduction:

The Noongar Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NCCI) is pleased to provide this submission to the WA Government's discussion paper regarding the proposed office for advocacy and accountability in Aboriginal affairs in Western Australia. NCCI recently launched as a member-based advocacy and capacity building organisation to support the growth of Aboriginal-owned businesses in the south-west of WA.

We have supported the WA Government's Aboriginal Procurement Policy as a key plank in the development of Aboriginal businesses and economic development for Noongar people. We strongly support the proposed office as a means to provide oversight regarding Aboriginal affairs in our State – particularly if the role can deliver long-term and sustained impacts, without being subject to the political cycle.

1. What are your views about the outline of the office's basic features on page 10-12? Does it miss out anything important? Is anything included that shouldn't be?

NCCI supports the proposed function of the new office and the list of activities presented on page 10 of the discussion paper. Our key area of interest is economic advancement and development of Aboriginal owned businesses. We believe the proposed office can assist this through monitoring the implementation of specific policies, particularly the Aboriginal Procurement Policy. We would like the office to assess the consistency of the policy and performance across government agencies. We understand the mandated targets for procurement are new and some agencies will perform better than others. We will be looking to the proposed office to highlight agencies who may not be performing as expected and assist us to celebrate and promote success stories.

Where formal inquiries or investigations are part of the day-to-day work of the office, we would expect to be called upon to provide advice on relevant matters. NCCI can assist the office in an advisory capacity, particularly where the topic of any inquiries might be relevant to business and/or the implementation of the Aboriginal Procurement Policy.

We support the statement in the discussion paper which says the office should be responsive to the needs and priorities of Aboriginal people. We would encourage the office to maintain a broad scope and be led by the input of community. We would encourage the office to avoid concentrating solely on welfare-based issues and pay due attention to



economic development and the potential of Aboriginal business to drive development and better outcomes.

We agree with the proposed structure of the new office and strongly support the statement that the holder of the office should be an Aboriginal person. We would suggest that the office holder should be adequately resourced with a small team of staff as independent hires, supporting the function and independence of the office. At a minimum we would expect the office holder to have a research/policy officer and administration officer. We would also expect that the office should not be co-located with any government agencies which may/may not become subject to any inquiries or investigations the office might be undertaking.

Depending on the workload of the office and current inquiries/investigations it may be necessary to increase resourcing on a case-by-case basis. We would expect the office holder to be able to make these decisions at their own discretion.

Regarding the stated powers of the office, we would suggest that the power to table reports in Parliament needs to be supported by a requirement for the Government of the day to respond to those reports. If there is no requirement to respond, the office's role is unlikely to be a catalyst for any real change. A requirement to respond highlights the Government's role/contribution and is more likely to result in active engagement with the findings and appropriate actions to address the shortfalls.

We also seek further detail regarding the powers of the office to obtain documents and information. How will this differ from the current freedom of information (FOI) provisions? How far will the power extend? How will other government agencies be required to respond to requests for documents and information? The detail for this provision of power needs to be more clearly stated.

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

NCCI would suggest that the formal name should be determined in consultation with Aboriginal people. We would support a name drawn from Aboriginal languages but recognise this will be difficult to achieve while also acknowledging the diversity of languages across our community. Our most important feedback is to suggest that the name should be as concise as possible. The working title for the discussion paper is too long and unwieldy. "Commissioner" has relevance as it is used for the National role, which is comparable to this proposal, and is recognised as having some authority and more influence than "advocate". "WA Aboriginal Affairs Commissioner" or just "Aboriginal Affairs Commissioner" may be a simple solution, but we would suggest putting a selection of potential names to an advisory group for further discussion. NCCI would be pleased to contribute further to this discussion.



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

NCCI would suggest the appointment of an interview panel, coordinated by DPC, and with representation from Aboriginal organisations across WA. It may also be advisable to include an interstate panel member. We suggest the interview panel should demonstrate gender balance and, as much as possible, a broad cross-section of industry backgrounds and experiences. NCCI would appreciate the opportunity to put forward specific suggestions for the make-up of the panel.

We would support the panel being required to meet face-to-face with a shortlist of applicants who score highly against the final written criteria for the office position. DPC should consider engaging the services of an executive search agent to bring forward high quality applications.

Closing:

Thank you for taking the time to consider this submission. We look forward to hearing more about how this office will take shape for the Aboriginal people of Western Australia.

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