

An idea for making government work better for Aboriginal people



I'm Ben Wyatt, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Treasurer for Western Australia.

One of my priorities as Minister for Aboriginal Affairs is for the State Government to work with Aboriginal people to get better social, economic, cultural and health outcomes.

The WA Government is already doing many different things to make this happen, and I'd like to share an idea with you about something I think we could do in the future.

Right now, it is just an idea. Over the next few months we will be talking to many Aboriginal people, as well as people in government and others. We will then write a report on what people have told us. Your input will help us decide what to do next.

Stronger accountability and advocacy

Our idea is to set up a new organisation to hold the government **accountable** for the way it works with Aboriginal people, and to **advocate** for the things that matter to Aboriginal people in WA.

In the past, governments have at times made decisions that have not been good for Aboriginal people, or delivered services in the wrong way and not made a real difference. We believe this would happen less if there was stronger government accountability to Aboriginal people. We think an official advocate for Aboriginal people would help the government listen better to Aboriginal people's priorities, views, concerns and ideas.

Accountability

When we talk about someone being accountable, we mean they have to be open about what they've been doing so other people can see if they're doing the right thing.

For example, the committee members of a corporation are accountable to the members. At the AGM the committee needs to explain what the corporation has done in the last year, especially about money. This way everyone can see if they are doing a good job or not.

Advocacy

An advocate helps the government listen to people outside government and speaks up about the things that are important to those people.

For example, when a land council writes a letter to ask the Federal Government to change the law on native title, the land council is doing advocacy for traditional owners.

What would be the new organisation's job?

The organisation would have legal powers to get information from the government, and make official reports to Parliament.

This would allow it to:

- Look at how government services are working how they can do better
- Check to see if the government is following the rules (legislation, human rights)
- Help the government and Aboriginal organisations work better together
- Look at the information the government is using to make decisions, to see if it should get better information or make a different decision
- Share success stories and examples of good partnerships

Would this be a new government department like the old Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA)?

No. DAA does not exist anymore, and the new organisation we are talking about would be different. It would be made up of one officially appointed person with special legal powers, and a team of support staff to help them. This person would be **independent** from the Government – Ministers would not be able to tell them what to do.

Would the new organisation help with individual problems like Centrelink breaches or tenancy issues?

No. There are already organisations for this, like the Ombudsman, the Aboriginal Legal Service, and community legal centres. The new organisation's job would be making sure the systems and rules are fair, culturally appropriate, and reflect the priorities of Aboriginal Western Australians.

Would this organisation have elected representatives from different Aboriginal groups?

No. The WA Government recognises that many Aboriginal people want an official representative structure and we will have those discussions with you in the future. But the idea we are talking about now is not about representing specific regions or groups – it is about having one officially appointed person making sure the government is **listening** properly and is **accountable** to Aboriginal people across WA. The organisation would build strong relationships with communities in all regions, and tell the government about their views and priorities.

What else is the WA Government doing for Aboriginal people?

The WA Government is working on a range of new ways to work with Aboriginal people for better outcomes. These include the Aboriginal Employment Strategy, Aboriginal Procurement Policy, land tenure reforms, remote community infrastructure upgrades, better housing support services, and reviewing heritage laws. The Government will also develop a long-term strategy for Aboriginal affairs to build lasting economic and cultural empowerment.

What would the organisation actually do?

- Running investigations and inquiries
- Writing reports and submissions
- Talking to people in government: State, Federal and local
- Talking to Aboriginal people and organisations across the State
- TV and radio interviews, press releases, newspaper articles, social media

We want to hear from you

1. What do you think of the idea?

Do you have comments or suggestions?

2. What should the name of the organisation be?

Some previous suggestions include "Commissioner for accountability in Aboriginal affairs", "First Nations Voice", or "Advocate for Aboriginal people". You may have a completely different idea. Is there an Aboriginal language word that would work for all Aboriginal people in WA?

3. How should Aboriginal people be involved in choosing the right person?

There are many Aboriginal organisations in WA. Which should have a role in the appointment process? What that role should be?

To tell us what you think or ask questions, please contact the Aboriginal Policy Unit on:

(08) 6552 5444

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Please contact us by **7 September 2018** to make sure your views are taken into account.

As this is an open process, we will publish all written feedback online unless you ask us not to, and Freedom of Information laws will apply.

