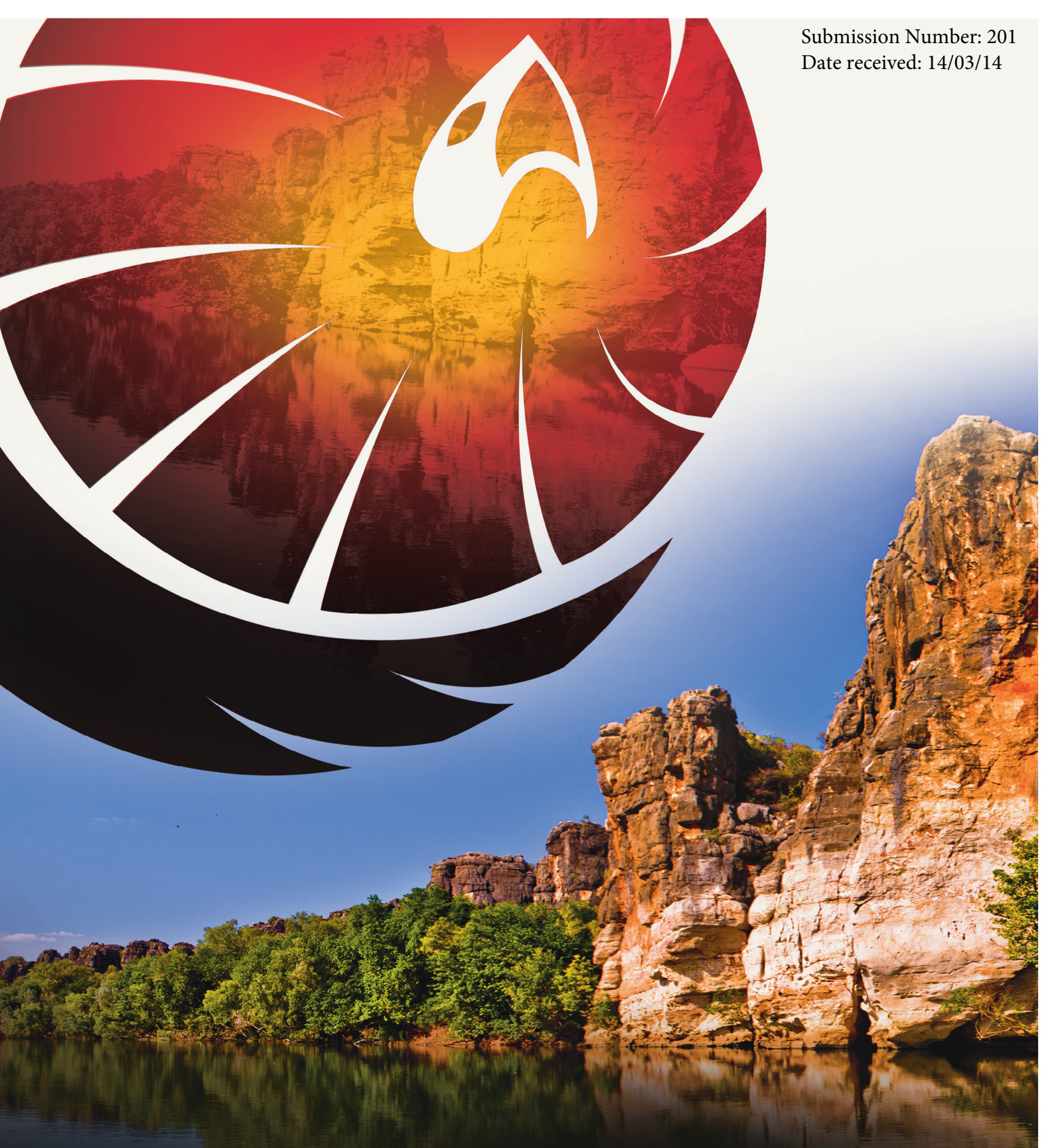


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**WINUN
NGARI**
ABORIGINAL CORPORATION

**SUBMISSION TO THE JOINT
SELECT COMMITTEE ON
NORTHERN AUSTRALIA**

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SUMMARY OF RECCOMENDATIONS

The Winun Ngari Aboriginal Corporation makes the following recommendations for consideration by the Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia:

1. There is a re-evaluation of the process for engagement in the preparation of the White Paper on northern Australia to provide for increased and greater collaboration with the remote and regional communities noting their restricted capacity to be engaged through conventional processes resulting from restricted mobility and poor communications infrastructure. To ensure effective engagement, the date for submission of the White Paper should be reassessed in light of a new engagement framework.
2. The Terms of Reference be amended to include:

‘consider and make recommendations with respect to Local, State and Federal Governance models with the aim to strengthen the role of aboriginal communities in regional areas regarding their future as communities and the development of their lands in accordance with the Australian Federal Governments obligations under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples’
3. Funding mechanisms to regional aboriginal representative bodies with the aim of ensuring that aboriginal people and communities have the capacity to make a meaningful contributions to the decision making process on growth and development of northern Australia. This means granting them the long-term resources to:
 - Be autonomous of broader government goals and objectives;
 - To properly engage with the community to understand the vision, aspirations and desires of their people; and
 - Plan and implement the goals and aspirations of their community to deliver on social, economic and environmental outcomes established through engagement.
4. The Terms of Reference being broadened to consider economic development through biodiversity and conservation management.
5. Support the funding of detailed investigations into the opportunity of the Kimberley Regions Assets. Funding should match the Western Australian’s \$130 million commitment to developing the Agricultural Industry in the West Kimberley.



6. Ensure that funding and investigation of the use of land and water for intensified agriculture is undertaken as a joint exercise between State and Federal Governments and the Traditional Owners of Country.
7. Support a jointly State and Federal Funded Agreement to undertake staged improvement of the Gibb River Road over the next four years.
8. Direct the Federal and State Governments to undertake a detailed review of land tenure systems in Australia to provide recommendations on legislative change that:
 - Ensures aboriginal people have a lasting cultural and customary interest in their lands despite development;
 - Grants Traditional Owners the right to facilitate economic improvements to their lands through commercial arrangement that are not bound by a defined government approvals process and the autonomy to make the ultimate determination on the improvements and development of their lands; and
 - Establishes an appropriate mechanism to fund Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Communities to have sufficient resources in the medium term to plan for the economic development of their lands and undertake such development with or without private sector involvement.
9. Consider a review of regional service agreements with a view to establishing a long-term funding and partnership model with regional service providers that leads to the transition of remote service delivery to community based organisations.
10. A northern transport infrastructure plan be developed with a focus on improving accessibility of potential economic development opportunities to market and also providing a safe year-round accessible travel network from remote communities to major towns and centres; and
11. State and Federal Governments provide long-term stable funding to facilitate regional community based organisations in the preparation and implementation of community layout plans to guide future development and infrastructure requirements.
12. That consideration is given to remote car access and training schemes. Such schemes should focus around stable funding to community based fleet, training and maintenance businesses which provide for pooled use of cars, improved maintenance of vehicles and increased trainer driving opportunities.
13. Consider the targeted planning and rollout of major communication infrastructure into remote aboriginal communities that will offer sufficient speed and connectivity to offer access to remotely provided education and health services;



14. Allocate appropriate funding (i.e. similar to the Royalties for Regions Community Resource Centre Funding) be allocated to ensure that remote aboriginal communities are provided the necessary technology to make the best use of high speed communication opportunities; and
15. That cost of data associated with high speed communication technology be absorbed by State and Federal Governments in the interests provide greater equity in the health and education services offered to remote communities.
16. A resourcing and funding arrangement be established which enables indigenous communities to educate young people on the heritage and cultural identity; and
17. As part of educational reform, consider cultural identity and education becoming part of remote community education curriculums with communities elders being granted the time and respect to provide cultural education within our schooling system.



1. INTRODUCTION

Winun Ngari Aboriginal Corporation (WNAC) welcomes the Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia and appreciates the opportunity to provide comment with respect to the Terms of Reference. Our comments are on various issues we consider relevant under the Terms of Reference to the future of Northern Australia, particularly with respect to the aboriginal people who are the traditional custodians of the land.

WNAC extends an invitation to the Committee Members to visit the West Kimberley and the remote aboriginal communities we work with to better inform you of the opportunities and barriers to development of many remote communities in the Kimberley Region.

WNAC looks forward to being actively engaged following the closure of the submission period right through to the finalisation of the White Paper documents. As you will pick up through our submission, we believe getting the future of Northern Australia right is about extensive engagement with the many and varied communities throughout this vast space. We trust the Committee feels the same.

2. WHO ARE WINUN NGARI

WNAC began operations more than 29 years ago in Derby, Western Australia, managing a handful of Aboriginal communities and administering Community Development and Employment Programs (CDEP) funding for all activities associated with community living. WNAC has since grown to become the second largest CDEP (now Remote Jobs and Communities Program [RJCP]) provider / Aboriginal resource agency in the West Kimberley.

WNAC provides services to 17 remote communities located along Gibb River Road including Looma and the surrounding communities. We estimate that as an organisation we cover a population of nearly one-thousand people from all age groups, including those who are temporary residents in Derby. Services vary from community to community but include training, enterprise and business development, employment, health and well-being and governance/administration.

In 2013, WNAC was awarded the responsibility to roll-out the Remote Jobs and Communities Programs for the Derby-West Kimberley Region following our successful involvement in the Community Development and Employment Program.

WNAC has worked tirelessly to ensure that the RJCP service is delivered to a high standard as it is our firm view that regional employment is the key to building more self-sufficient communities. In addition Jobs for indigenous people provides a tangible link to "closing the gap" a Federal Government initiative which WNAC firmly believes in and supports.

More recently WNAC in acknowledging the opportunity, and in some respects obligation, for it to contribute significant benefits to the aboriginal people of the Kimberley has commenced the development of a strategic plan to enable organisational financial sustainability. The key driver for this is to ensure the benefits currently delivered by WNAC are not negatively affected by changes in government policy in the future. In order to deliver this outcome WNAC are assessing the use of current



assets to establish a suitable financial base then work to build independent businesses which will enable increased indigenous participation in the workforce and also deliver benefits and services to remote communities.

3. GETTING THE WHITE PAPER RIGHT – COLLABORATION AND ENGAGEMENT

WNAC strongly recommends that an effective, thorough and meaningful engagement process is undertaken with the aboriginal community of northern Australia. Our communities:

- Form the foundation of the region;
- Are regionally sparse and culturally different; and
- Highly knowledgeable on country.

Importantly our communities have the right, founded in the United Nations Declaration on Indigenous Rights (UDIR) for the State to provide clear, unhindered opportunities for the traditional custodians of this land to have responsibility in conjunction with the State to make determinations on the future social, environmental and economic factors that will define impacts on indigenous people's rights to live freely on traditional lands.

WNAC believes that effective early engagement during the White Paper process will also lead to improved outcomes through the implementation of the White Paper recommendations and a greater sense of ownership amongst the aboriginal community of Northern Australia.

The current extent of consultation or notification on the White Paper rely primarily on internet, general media and the use of general public hearings on the more populated areas of northern Australia. Our communities, much like others:

- May not be aware of that the white paper is even being prepared due to a lack of communication technology; and
- Be restricted in their capacity to attend and make representations at general hearings due to the extremely low levels of car ownership/ use amongst remote aboriginal communities.

These two issues can be verified by a simply review of ABS statistics regarding car ownership or access to the internet at home for aboriginal people in Northern Australia.

Although peak bodies such as WNAC can make representations on much higher level issues, we also consider it is incumbent on the Committee to make itself more accessible to remote aboriginal Australia to strengthen input from the actual traditional owners of lands and those people who may be affected by strategic decisions resulting from the White Paper. To do this, would be pushing back the date for submission of the White Paper to Parliament. The consequence however is a better outcome for our future.

WNAC therefore recommends the Joint Select Committee re-evaluate its process for engagement in the preparation of the White Paper on northern Australia to provide for increased and greater collaboration with the remote and regional communities noting their restricted capacity to be engaged through conventional processes resulting from restricted mobility and poor communications infrastructure. To ensure effective



engagement, the date for submission of the White Paper should be reassessed in light of a new engagement framework.

4. GIVING OUR COMMUNITIES POWER TO INFORM AND DETERMINE THEIR FUTURE

WNAC believes that there is an overarching responsibility of the Joint Select Committee to thoroughly consider the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in all aspects of this review. We note that the Australian Government became a signatory in 2007.

We specifically refer to the rights of our communities to:

- Self-determination by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and *freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development*;
- autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions; and
- Indigenous people having the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for the development or use of their lands or territories and other resources.

These articles of the Declaration above all others highlight the importance of this Joint Select Committee accepting and recommending that regional communities should be given the necessary resources to properly consider, plan and finally make decisions (binding to government) on their future social, environmental and economic aspects of the future. This particularly extends to the use and development of land irrespective of tenure or Native Title which appears to be a strong focus of this committee's Terms of Reference.

The Federal Government needs to reconsider the governance arrangement about the future development of our northern regions if it is going to achieve these obligations for which it has agreed. It must grant autonomy to determine decisions about the future of communities and the traditional lands bound in legislation. It must also grant regional communities the necessary resources to allow effective planning to be undertaken.

The new revised models for the economic development of the indigenous population provides a step towards greater responsibility on the decision making of many regional communities through Community Action Plans and Implementation Plans as part of the Remote Jobs and Communities Program. Decisions however are ultimately focused around job and individual wealth creation. This does not deliver the level of autonomy and decision-making powers for communities as a whole to determine their social, environmental and economic future.

A report prepared through Desert Knowledge Australia titled "Fixing the hole in Australia's Heartland: How Government needs to work in remote Australia" (2012) makes specific recommendation's around a potential new governance structure to support improved regional outcomes. The report suggests that possibly developing new regional authorities '*coupled with adequate and predictable financing is likely to both improve the quality of outcomes*'. This is highlighted as one effective amendment to our existing governance



framework that will increase local autonomy on activities and programs that operate in regional areas without fundamentally accepting the principle of a centralised government system.

The recommendations of this report acknowledge that governance reform does not mean to necessarily hand authority over to aboriginal people. It emphasises our right, the government's obligation and the broader community's expectation that effective governance at our regional and remote communities must have endorsement of the aboriginal community.

Increasing local autonomy about the future and in the decision making process for northern Australia also achieves other positive outcomes which have been recognised including:

1. Greater empowerment in the decision making process leads to greater ownership and involvement during implementation (Kimberley Land Council and others). The Kimberley Land Council goes to great lengths to raise this matter in their own submission to the Committee and WNAC supports the premise that ownerships in the decision making process leads to ownership and responsibility through implementation.
2. It ensures that local and regional circumstances are not ignored avoiding a one-size fits all approach which can on occasion do more harm than good.
3. It provides an avenue to strengthen traditional and customary institutions amongst communities.

We therefore Recommend the Joint Select Committee undertake the following as part of its review:

1. **Amend the Terms of Reference to include:**

'consider and make recommendations with respect to Local, State and Federal Governance models with the aim to strengthen the role of aboriginal communities in regional areas regarding their future as communities and the development of their lands in accordance with the Australian Federal Governments obligations under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples'

2. **Funding mechanisms to regional aboriginal representative bodies with the aim of ensuring that aboriginal people and communities have the capacity to make a meaningful contributions to the decision making process on growth and development of northern Australia. This means granting them the long-term resources to:**

- **Be autonomous of broader government goals and objectives;**
- **To properly engage with the community to understand the vision, aspirations and desires of their people; and**
- **Plan and implement the goals and aspirations of their community to deliver on social, economic and environmental outcomes established through engagement.**



5. RESPONDING TO THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

5.1.1. Examine the potential for development of the region's mineral, energy, agricultural, tourism, defence and other industries

5.1.1.1. Biodiversity and Conservation in the Northern Economy

The Joint Select Committee needs to properly consider the economic opportunities that northern Australia offers with respect to biodiversity, natural resource management and conservation.

The Australian Biodiversity and Conservation Strategy 2010 – 2030 highlights the opportunity biodiversity conservation offers to the economy through market mechanisms and employment. The Strategy outlines:

Markets provide a way to value biodiversity so that it can be considered alongside economic and social factors. Although putting a price on the value of biodiversity and ecosystem services is difficult, well-designed markets are one of the most effective policy instruments for attributing economic value to biodiversity and can be very effective in encouraging investment in biodiversity conservation. In using market-based approaches, we must ensure that new markets, such as those for carbon and water, are designed and implemented to avoid unintended negative consequences for biodiversity. We should seek multiple beneficial environmental outcomes wherever possible.

Strategic investments and partnerships are an increasingly important way of identifying, prioritising and achieving conservation goals. For example, cooperation between governments and the private and non-government sectors has already resulted in major private land additions to the NRS which would not have been possible otherwise. Emerging markets for a number of ecosystem services are creating opportunities for long-term investments in biodiversity conservation. Market-based offset schemes are developing as a mechanism by which biodiversity conservation can be integrated into public and private land use decisions.

It is also important that we encourage increasing private investment in biodiversity conservation so that both the costs and the benefits of biodiversity use are distributed across relevant sectors. It is equally important that increased investment is prioritised and targeted for best effect.

Through the development of Biodiversity and conservation markets, greater participation in the national economy amongst aboriginal people can be achieved. This is again articulated through the national Strategy:

Indigenous peoples have a special connection and relationship with Australia's natural environments. Accordingly, the important role of Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge in conserving Australia's biodiversity needs to be more actively promoted to other biodiversity managers.....Environmental management and biodiversity conservation can provide significant opportunities



for employment, for maintaining culture and for raising living standards in Indigenous communities.

Biodiversity and conservation as a part of the economy is already starting to have positive impacts in our communities. One of the most remote communities we provide services to, the Kandiwal Community, sits on the edge of the Mitchell River National Park which incorporates some of the Kimberley's most famous and respected natural attractions. Over several years, the community has provided ranger management services in the National Park through agreements with the State government.

This is just one example of conservation leading to employment in our area. A report prepared by the State Government Department of Environment and Conservation titled '*Protecting the Kimberley: A synthesis of scientific knowledge to support conservation management in the Kimberley region of Western Australia*' (2009) along with programs run through the non-government organisation NRM Rangelands WA are leading to identification of many other opportunities for conservation management which provide opportunities for employment within our remote communities.

WNAC has reviewed a number of other submissions by aboriginal corporations or those representing aboriginal interest with respect of the development of Northern Australia. The vast majority highlight the importance of the Terms of Reference being broadened to consider economic development through biodiversity and conservation management. We support the amendment of the Terms of Reference consistent with the views expressed in those submissions.

5.1.1.2. Agribusiness

WNAC consider that prosperity and economic growth of the area we manage and adjoining communities will be greatly enhanced through government support for the development of:

- the Fitzroy Valley adjoining the community of Fitzroy Crossing; and
- the Knowsley Agricultural area directly South of Derby.

Both opportunities have been flagged by the current State Government of Western Australia for investigation to support large scale West-Kimberley Agricultural Schemes similar to the Ord River Scheme. Investigations have already commenced through the Department of Water to firm up water capacity and availability.

The development of an irrigated agriculture Scheme will increase the regions' capacity to harness its water resources to provide food solutions to the international community. In doing so, local jobs can be created around the sustainable use and development of traditional lands and increase economic participation of such communities as Fitzroy Crossing and Mowanjum. These communities already have an active role in agriculture through the pastoral industry of the region.

The importance of getting sustainable development right through proper planning and engagement with Traditional owners and local indigenous communities is highlighted throughout the Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce. Effective development and management of these important customary and environmental assets can lead to job creation in both agricultural operations but also in land and water management.



WNAC supports the continued investigation into potential irrigated development of the West Kimberley provided it is done in a manner that respects the importance of land and water to local indigenous communities and that effective management is planned for through locally based governance of irrigation areas and well-resourced and funded land management schemes.

WNAC therefore recommends that the Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia make recommendations;

- **which support the fund detailed investigations into the opportunity of the Kimberley Regions Assets. Funding should match the Western Australian's \$130 million commitment to developing the Agricultural Industry in the West Kimberley; and**
- **ensure that the use of funding and investigation of the use of land and water for intensified agriculture is undertaken as a joint exercise between State and Federal Governments and the Traditional Owners of Country.**

5.1.1.3. Tourism

The Gibb River Road is a former cattle route that stretches almost 660 kilometres (410 mi) through The Kimberley between the Western Australian town of Derby and the Kununurra and Wyndham junction of the Great Northern Highway. The Gibb River Road is a main access way to a number of discrete remote aboriginal communities built in the 60's and 70's based on the intention of returning aboriginal people back to their traditional lands.

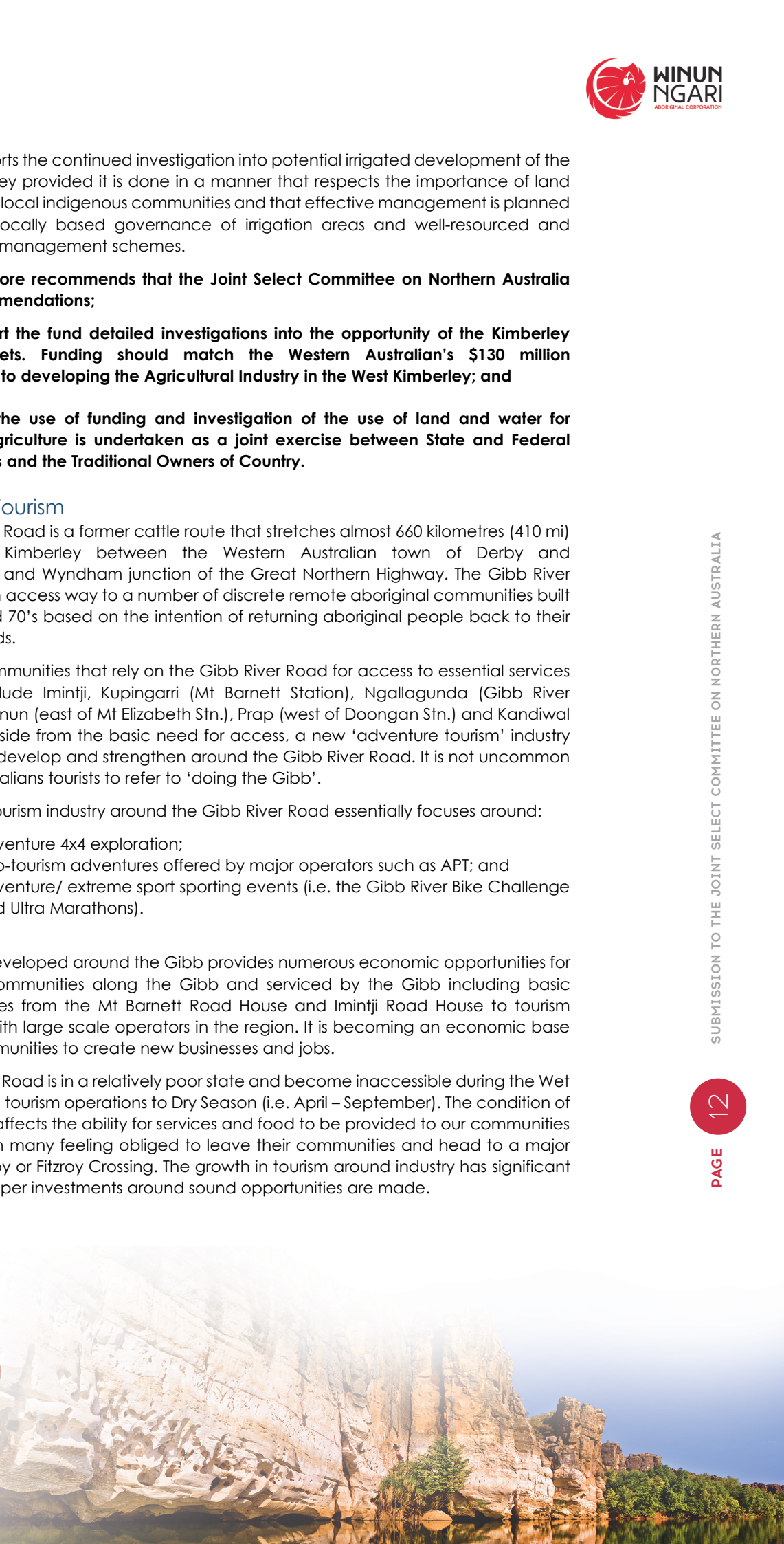
Aboriginal communities that rely on the Gibb River Road for access to essential services and food include Imintji, Kupingarri (Mt Barnett Station), Ngallagunda (Gibb River Station), Dodonun (east of Mt Elizabeth Stn.), Prap (west of Doongan Stn.) and Kandiwal Community. Aside from the basic need for access, a new 'adventure tourism' industry has begun to develop and strengthen around the Gibb River Road. It is not uncommon for many Australians tourists to refer to 'doing the Gibb'.

The growing tourism industry around the Gibb River Road essentially focuses around:

- adventure 4x4 exploration;
- eco-tourism adventures offered by major operators such as APT; and
- adventure/ extreme sport sporting events (i.e. the Gibb River Bike Challenge and Ultra Marathons).

The industry developed around the Gibb provides numerous economic opportunities for our remote communities along the Gibb and serviced by the Gibb including basic support services from the Mt Barnett Road House and Imintji Road House to tourism partnerships with large scale operators in the region. It is becoming an economic base for these communities to create new businesses and jobs.

The Gibb River Road is in a relatively poor state and become inaccessible during the Wet Season limiting tourism operations to Dry Season (i.e. April – September). The condition of the road also affects the ability for services and food to be provided to our communities which results in many feeling obliged to leave their communities and head to a major centre of Derby or Fitzroy Crossing. The growth in tourism around industry has significant potential if proper investments around sound opportunities are made.



Upgrading the Gibb River to increase year round tourism activity will also link remote communities to a major centre year round improving provision of services and capacity to respond to emergencies. Of particular interest to the Federal Government is that it will also increase accessibility to the Yampi Training Ground located on the Southern edge of King Sound.

Yampi Sound Training Area consists of 566,000ha, 35km south of Koolan Island on Yampi Sound, Western Australia and was acquired in by the Defence Department in 1978. It has been mainly unused by the defence force due to year round accessibility being limited because of the condition of the Gibb River Road. The 2012 Defence Force Posture Review however recommends increased use of Yampi moving forward and upgrades to support possible allied forces training operations.

WNAC Believe there is a sound business case for Federal and State funding to support road improvements to the Gibb River Road. If done so it will deliver;

- further growth in tourism supporting economic development of remote indigenous communities;
- afford remote communities with an expected right to reasonable, safe and reliable access to basic services including municipal service, health, education and food supply; and
- improve accessibility to Yampi Training ground enhancing opportunities for heightened use and improvement to the facility by the Defence force.

WNAC therefore recommend the Joint Select Committee on northern Australia support a jointly State and Federal Funded Agreement to undertake staged improvement of the Gibb River Road over the next four years.

5.1.2. Establish a conducive regulatory, taxation and economic environment

5.1.2.1. Land Tenure

There is broad scale recognition amongst researchers and human rights experts that security of tenure for aboriginal communities is a critical matter which requires resolution to facilitate economic development in remote areas. This issue particularly appears to arise with respect to accessibility to undertake innovative land use and development in regional areas and the impact this may have on the extinguishment of Native Title.

Extensive research was completed by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Studies during 2012 resulting in the culmination of a detailed report titled 'Secure tenure for home ownership and economic development on land subject to native title'. The report highlighted a number of conclusions and paradoxes around the various forms of land tenure, with a focus on Western Australian aboriginal tenure arrangements.

The findings lead the researchers to conclude that future systems of aboriginal land tenure must have the following characteristics:

- *It must be inalienable from Aboriginal ownership.*
- *It should combine the elements of customary connections to country and the Crown's*



- *Torrens titling system, which provides a guarantee of security of title and priority of interests in the land.*
- *It should enable the Aboriginal landholders to retain their underlying cultural connections to and collective responsibilities for land while at the same time enabling them to exercise their proprietary rights of ownership to meet their aspirations for economic development.*
- *It should enable collective ownership, management and control according to local circumstances and be respectful of Aboriginal decision-making authority.*
- *It should be capable of being assigned to individual Aboriginal people, to governments for infrastructure or other public purposes, or to other third parties in the form of secure non-perpetual subsidiary interests, such as subleases.*
- *It should include provisions to minimise the exposure of disadvantaged Aboriginal households to undue financial risk.*
- *It should enable rental incomes from third parties to flow back to the Aboriginal owner or ownership group.*
- *Reversionary interests should always be to the ultimate Aboriginal owner or ownership group.*
- *It should enable the subsidiary titles to be used as security for mortgage loans.*
- *The opportunity for individual or household home ownership should be a matter for the group to determine.*

In their conclusion they suggest:

Overall, leasehold systems have the capacity to respect customary interests in land because the land is never alienated from the Aboriginal owners. If Aboriginal landowners were given the tools to act as landlords, their land could be opened up for optimum economic use in ways consistent with local aspirations, by Aboriginal people, by third parties or by government, without the need to relinquish Aboriginal control or to forfeit their native title rights and interests.

Whatever the final mechanism, such research should be given serious weight as part of this White Paper. It is our view that the debate around land tenure reform has focused too much on ways to 'fast-track' or cut red tape associated with Native Title and Land accessibility to the private sector to complete development. A shift in thinking is needed instead to focus on how land tenure reform can facilitate economic development of our remote indigenous communities without comprising the cultural connections to the land.

We strongly support a more detailed review into the reform of Land Tenure that will ensure development of traditional lands can occur but such development must only be done so in a way that protects indigenous peoples rights under the United Nations Declaration on Indigenous Rights which ultimately grant aboriginal people the right to decide and manage the development of their cultural lands **without a loss of those cultural rights.**

WNAC recommends that the Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia provide clear direction to the Federal and State Governments to undertake a detailed review of land tenure systems in Australia to provide recommendations on legislative change that:

- **Ensures aboriginal people have a lasting cultural and customary interest in their lands despite development;**
- **Grants Traditional Owners the right to facilitate economic improvements to their lands through commercial arrangement that are not bound by a defined**



government approvals process and the autonomy to make the ultimate determination on the improvements and development of their lands; and

- **Establishes an appropriate mechanism to fund Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Communities to have sufficient resources in the medium term to plan for the economic development of their lands and undertake such development with or without private sector involvement.**

5.1.2.2. Remote Service Delivery

WNAC notes that recent policy approach to the provision of services to remote indigenous communities has focused around the recentralisation of services and the delivery by Local Government or the Private Sector. We consider community-based organisations such as WNAC do still have the capacity to provide localised services to communities. Research funded through the Australian Centre for Local Government Excellence completed in 2012 titled '*Local Government Service Delivery to Remote Indigenous Communities*' in fact found that the capacity of community based organisations to deliver various remote services should not be under estimated.

The review of previous community based organisation's research and case studies completed as part of the research found that community based organisations have historically had capacity to deliver high quality services to communities particularly where inputs to the service are community rather than technical based. The lack of available skills within a community or an actual interest in the provision of more municipal based services had however effected reasonable service provision to such communities.

The research however notes that sufficiently resourced community organisations can effectively deliver all services to regional communities. The inherent benefits of working toward this outcome is greater levels of trust and respect between service providers as well as enhanced local employment opportunities within the community themselves. The improved sense of trust and increased benefit of local input into the provision of services was also noted in the Federal Governments '*Evaluation of Service Delivery in Remote Indigenous Communities*' completed by the Office of Evaluation and Audit in 2009.

WNAC supports a long term vision back towards community based organisation delivery rather than regionalise service provision as it establishes greater sense of ownership and responsibility amongst communities to manage and develop their future. We acknowledge that factionalism and financial mismanagement have affected the public discourse regarding such arrangements. However, if the government were to take an approach whereby under skilled or semi-dysfunctional organisations were complemented by, and linked into, larger specific-purpose regional service agencies, longer terms skills and capacity amongst such organisations could be achieved. Simply replacing them does not deliver on the opportunity for development of skills, education and capacity amongst our communities.

WNAC continues to deliver a number of successful community services and would welcome the opportunity to take on more through long-term partnership with regional providers such as Local Government or with Kimberley Regional Service Providers. If a long-term vision to such arrangements were taken by government, the successful development of resilient and skilled communities would be established throughout northern Australia.



WNAC therefore recommends the Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia consider a review of regional service agreements with a view to establishing a long-term funding and partnership model with regional service providers that leads to the transition of remote service delivery to community based organisations.

5.1.3. Address Impediments to Growth

5.1.3.1. Infrastructure

WNAC supports the views of many other submissions made to the Joint Select Committee on the importance of infrastructure to facilitate growth. Without it, access to markets for tourism, agriculture and mining are hindered or not feasible through current transport networks. A clear established northern transport infrastructure plan must be developed across all States and Territories to increase market accessibility and improve opportunities for economic diversification of the region.

Transport Infrastructure is also important to ensuring that our communities are provided fair and reasonable access to services and that we can meet a basic obligation to ensure safe and secure food supply. Many of our communities are not afforded this basic right and a coherent regional road access program needs to be developed to inform continued improvements in accessibility to remote communities in northern Australia.

We also note that infrastructure to remote communities, including power, water and sewer provision are critical to the effective operation and management of many remote communities. An effective mechanism for service delivery based around community based organisations to manage and maintain these assets is preferred by WNAC as it facilitates improves responsiveness and makes better use of local knowledge.

Improved community and infrastructure planning is needed to better establish management and maintenance as well as capital works programs. Although the State of WA has undertaken some level of planning for remote aboriginal communities in the past, funding has been irregular and the level of engagement through the State's centralised planning program has been limited.

WNAC strongly supports community empowerment to develop and subsequently implement community layout plans. Divestment of this responsibility will achieve better outcomes and allow for increased consideration of cultural planning requirements in lieu of more rigid statutory planning which is driven through the Department of Planning's approach in the past.

WNAC recommends to the Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia that:

- **a northern transport infrastructure plan be developed with a focus on improving accessibility of potential economic development opportunities to market and also providing a safe year-round accessible travel network from remote communities to major towns and centres; and**
- **State and Federal Governments provide long-term stable funding to facilitate regional community based organisations in the preparation and implementation of community layout plans to guide future development and infrastructure requirements.**



5.1.3.2. Mobility

Just as accessibility is restricted by a poor standard of road infrastructure, the actual mobility of many indigenous people in remote communities is equally an issue. Access to motor vehicles and the actual qualification to drive a motor vehicle in remote communities is significantly less compared to State or National averages. A 2010 ABS report called 'The health and welfare of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' identified that 71% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults living in remote areas had no public transport, with 15% unable to reach places when needed due to lack of transport (ABS, 2010). Moreover, in the most recent survey conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, nearly one-third (32%) of Indigenous people in remote areas had no access to a motor vehicle (ABS, 2010)."

WNACs own experience regarding vehicle accessibility and mobility in our own communities reflects these statistics (WNAC provides driver training programs).

Actual mobility of our remote population increases disadvantage by limiting accessibility to health, education, social services and also employment. This affects capacity to keep the population healthy, up skilled and facilitate entrance into the workplace. These issues have been highlighted in a brief report prepared for the Australian Institute and Family Studies in 2011 called 'The relationship between transport and disadvantage in Australia'.

A new approach to remote mobility improvement is needed across all tiers of government as the impact this has on our remote communities we believe often 'fall off the radar'. It is however the most basic inhibitor to improved living outcomes and employment opportunities in remote part of Northern Australia.

WNAC recommends to the Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia that consideration is given to remote car access and training schemes. Such schemes should focus around stable funding to community based fleet, training and maintenance businesses which provide for pooled use of cars, improved maintenance of vehicles and increased trainer driving opportunities.

5.1.4. Identify the critical economic and social infrastructure needed to support the long term growth of the region, and ways to support planning and investment in that infrastructure

5.1.4.1. Communication Technology

Increased communication technology within remote aboriginal communities is a significant priority for the improvement of service delivery to remote communities. Increased and faster connectivity between major and remote service centres will afford remote communities the opportunity to the social services, particularly health and education, that is much closer to an urban standard simply because it removes geographical and labour barriers. The importance of communication technology as part of the Closing the Gap initiative makes it an imperative for major investment throughout Northern Australia.

WNAC recommends to the Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia make recommendations for:



- **the targeted planning and rollout of major communication infrastructure into remote aboriginal communities that will offer sufficient speed and connectivity to offer access to remotely provided education and health services;**
- **appropriate funding (i.e. similar to the Royalties for Regions Community Resource Centre Funding) be allocated to ensure that remote aboriginal communities are provided the necessary technology to make the best use of high speed communication opportunities; and**
- **the cost of data associated with high speed communication technology be absorbed by State and Federal Governments in the interests of providing greater equity in the health and education services offered to remote communities.**

5.1.4.2. Mental Health amongst our Youth

Youth Suicide in our communities has become endemic. Some statistics suggest that suicide amongst Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males, 15 years to 19 years, are four-and-a-half times more likely than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait females, 15 years to 19 years, are six times more likely to die by suicide than other young females. This figure anecdotally reaches up to 100 times the national average in some Kimberley communities.

The future of our remote communities depends on an effective solution to this issue. WNAC believe the delivery of conventional social and mental services will not bring about the change needed. Communities must be resourced and given the responsibility to work with the young people in the community to give them purpose and a sense of belonging.

Programs such as the Yiriman Project operated out of Fitzroy Crossing reflects the way in which all layers of governance need to rethink how this issue is approached. This project was developed following increased concern of the Elders for their young people, who were facing increasingly serious issues such as self-harm, substance abuse and the loss of cultural identity. The program focuses on reconnecting young people with their culture and identity and has been nationally recognised through its award for the 2012 Reconciliation Indigenous Governance Award.

WNAC believes that local communities must be empowered to have the time and resources to ensure young people in our community are granted the opportunity to understand and be educated about their cultural history and connections. Government and Non-Government Organisations need to realise this and provide means to ensure communities simply have the time for cultural education within a westernised economy and governance system.

WNAC recommends the Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia considers:

- **a resourcing and funding arrangement which enables indigenous communities to educate young people on the heritage and cultural identity; and**
- **as part of educational reform, consider cultural identity and education becoming part of remote community education curriculums with communities**



elders being granted the time and respect to provide cultural education within our schooling system.

6. Summary and Conclusion

The Winun Ngari Aboriginal Corporation appreciates the opportunity to provide a contribution to the Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia. We consider the recommendations we have provided are sound and will lead to improved amenity for remote aboriginal people of Northern Australia and increased economic prosperity.

We strongly recommend the Committee consider casting a wider and more diverse net with respect to the engagement being undertaken as part of the White Paper. Effective, meaningful engagement with the aboriginal people of northern Australia is critical to allow the region to take ownership and being part of an outcome that will benefit the nation.

WNAC would welcome the opportunity to discuss the aforementioned and or any other matters with the committee. Should this be the desire of the committee please do not hesitate to contact the Chief Executive officer the details of whom are included on the back cover.





**WINUN
NGARI**
ABORIGINAL CORPORATION