



**Aboriginal Water and Environmental Advisory Group
Meeting No 12 – 20 September 2022**

Communique

The Aboriginal Water and Environmental Advisory Group (AWEAG) held its twelfth meeting on Tuesday 20 September 2022 at the Kimberley Land Council offices in Broome. The meeting was preceded by a visit to Nyamba Buru Yawuru's visitor centre on 19 September 2022 for a Welcome to Country and smoking ceremony. This was followed by a site-visit to Minyirr Park. The Director General of the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (department), Ms Michelle Andrews, and AWEAG member Jason Barrow co-chaired the meeting.

The main items presented and discussed included the following:

Update on Outcomes of AWEAG Review

Mr Iqbal Samnakay gave an update on the department's Community Paid Participation Policy, which was circulated to the AWEAG members for their feedback. The policy will go through the final approvals processes in the department in the next few weeks.

Ms Marianne Yrke gave a presentation on the recent process to recruit new AWEAG members, which included advertisements on social media and 17 indigenous radio stations. This resulted in eight members being appointed or reappointed. Some regions are still not represented on the AWEAG (Great Sandy Desert, Goldfields-Esperance, South-West and Geraldton-Mid West only has one member). Members were invited to suggest potential new members from their networks.

Regional Overview – Kimberley

Ms Susie Williams gave an overview of the department's work in the Kimberley region. The major water and environmental issues in the region are Ord River water licensing, water allocation planning (Fitzroy, Derby, La Grange), water licensing for mining and pastoral industry, town water supply and upgrades to Aboriginal community water services, and emergent industries such as unconventional gas and renewable hydrogen.

Members discussed how allocation plans boundaries could be extended beyond hydrological bounds to encompass broader regional and cultural areas.

Climate Adaptation Strategy

Mr James Duggie gave a presentation on the development of the State Government's Climate Adaptation Strategy, including the strategic directions in the strategy and opportunities for future engagement with Aboriginal people to support climate resilience. The adaptation strategy follows from the WA Climate Policy, which was launched in November 2020 and set the Government's policy commitments to transition to a climate resilient and lower carbon economy.

Members highlighted the need to ensure that Aboriginal people are part of the discussions and to treat climate, water, people and industry in an integrated fashion.



Reconciliation Action Plan Update

Ms Jillian Collard presented a video on the launch of the department's Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) on 30 August 2022. The RAP sets out the actions that the department must deliver against. Ms Collard is part of a senior leadership team that is leading the delivery of the RAP across the department, so that it becomes embedded in the way we work across the agency.

AWEAG members were interested to know how the department's RAP compares to those of other agencies. Ms Collard will be developing networks across agencies and Aboriginal leaders to build a better understanding of what is happening in the Reconciliation space.

Water Reform Bill Progress Update

Dr Daniel Nevin provided an update on the progress of the drafting of the Water Reform Bill.

Water Corporation: Water and Sewerage services to Aboriginal communities

Mr Paul Volk and Mr Anthony Bell from the Water Corporation provided an update on the upgrade of water and sewerage services in Aboriginal communities.

Mr Bell provided further information about the Essential Municipal Services Upgrade Program (EMSUP), where work has commenced to upgrade water and sewerage services in seven remote communities. Mr Volk gave an update on the Regional Essential Services Program (RESP) which is a longer-term program to hand over essential services for a further 134 Aboriginal communities from the Department of Communities to Water Corporation (water and sewerage) and Horizon Power (electricity), from 1 April 2023. Each community will need to be consulted to work out a program, and the overall budget needs to be agreed by Treasury. The program will involve issues such as land tenure, asset ownership and local service provision. It is a major step forward in terms of improving services to Aboriginal communities. The primary focus for Water Corporation will be on water quality.

AWEAG members sought clarification on which communities would be provided with services. Mr Volk confirmed that the 141 communities were those currently being serviced by the Department of Communities, which are generally those with a population of 50 people or more.

Pilbara Cultural Land Management Program

Ms Josephine Searle spoke about the Pilbara Cultural Land Management Program (PCLMP), an alliance of 12 different native title holders across the Pilbara region, working with the Pilbara Development Commission and consultants to improve cultural land management in the Pilbara. The PCLMP held a five-day forum which involved presentations by Government and Aboriginal participants, ranger training and on country visits.