



## **Aboriginal Water and Environmental Advisory Group (AWEAG)**

**Meeting 3 – 5<sup>th</sup> March 2020**

### **Summary**

#### **Terms of Reference**

Members discussed the scope of their input. It was agreed that DWER will provide written documents for members to discuss with their networks if wider input from members' organisations or communities is required.

#### **Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) and Aboriginal Engagement Strategy**

Members were informed of the progress of the department's Reconciliation Action Plan. Key areas of focus and achievement include:

- Retention practices
- Employment of an Aboriginal employee to coordinate the RAP
- Procurement policy becoming effective (to remain in line with state government targets)

As part of the RAP, the department is developing an Aboriginal Engagement Strategy. It aims to improve the way the department engages with Aboriginal people at all levels of policy, planning and management (from state-wide legislation and policy, to local management). The group highlighted the importance of having a strong vision that acknowledges the rights and responsibilities of First Nations people and how DWER can support them to achieve their goals, consider how DWER can link with existing programs, build consideration of cultural protocols and ensuring cultural safety in all areas, reconsider language and structure to ensure it acknowledges the goal of building mutual benefit and ensures free, prior and informed consent through engagement.

#### **Water Resources Reform update**

The group discussed some of the key water management tools that were outlined in 2013 document *Securing Western Australia's Water Future: Position Paper – reforming water resources management*, and outlined which aspects will support improved engagement with Aboriginal people.

#### **Strategic Aboriginal Water Reserves**

The Department is working with stakeholders to investigate opportunities to create Strategic Aboriginal Water Reserves (SAWRs) in areas where water is available. A Strategic Aboriginal Water Reserve would put aside a portion of water (within the allocation limit), which would be managed exclusively for future economic development by and for the benefit of Aboriginal people on that country. The group discussed how these might work in different areas, who may benefit from them, and how they may be used. The group identified that overall water management must be sustainable, all people involved must be given the opportunity to be part of the consultation, and must have the right people speaking for the right areas. Mr Fred Taylor (Chair of the Yamatji Traditional Owner Negotiation Team) presented on how Strategic Aboriginal Water Reserves will work in the Yamatji Nation ILUA. The full terms are laid out in the ILUA, which can be found here:



<https://www.wa.gov.au/government/document-collections/yamatji-nation-indigenous-land-use-agreement-documents>

### **AWEAG forward planning discussion**

The group raised a number of issues and questions for the AWEAG to discuss through ongoing discussions on policy and legislation. These included:

- Climate change, and the impacts on both the environment and on cultural values and obligations.
- Transparency to community around licensing, monitoring and compliance and enforcement
- Need for deeper levels of engagement and considerations of Traditional Owners concerns.
- Use of legislation to improve resource management around climate change, impacts of development, and to support Aboriginal people to care for country.

To help build a 'library' of ideas for building on these ideas, each AWEAG meeting will invite local DWER staff and Traditional Owners to outline the work being done in the regions at local levels.

### **Native Title Vegetation Policy**

The group discussed the engagement process for the Native Vegetation discussion paper, and how the input received will be built into the policy. They also discussed the policy's intent, and the technique of taking a bioregional approach, issues around availability of native vegetation maps and the ability to "ground truth" them through satellite imagery. Members highlighted the importance of working with local groups in landscape restoration. The group will provide detailed feedback when the policy is released for public comment.