



**Aboriginal Water and Environmental Advisory Group
Meeting No 6 – 10 May 2021**

Communique

The Aboriginal Water and Environmental Advisory Group (AWEAG) held its sixth meeting on Monday 10 May 2021 at Prime House. Mike Rowe, Director General of the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation chaired the meeting.

Main items discussed include the following:

Member Stories

Members shared stories and lessons learned from engagement with Government and industry (including the Department). Members noted challenges associated with lack of clarity in decision making when navigating across government structures and emphasised the importance of genuine consultation in early stages of development. Members also highlighted the challenges associated with defining and interpreting terminology between organisations and what is understood by the community generally and by Aboriginal people.

The Department noted the importance of working across Government to ensure engagement with Aboriginal communities is coordinated and consolidated where possible. The Department is also committed to listen, empower, and keep working together with Aboriginal people.

Strategic Aboriginal Water Reserves

Members were informed of the progress of the Department's work on developing Strategic Aboriginal Water Reserves (SAWRs). The Department is working with Aboriginal people to investigate opportunities to create SAWRs in areas of the State where water is available.

The group noted the importance of SAWRs for future economic development for Aboriginal people. The group also acknowledged the discussions that are currently taking place nationally in relation to the development of targets for Closing the Gap initiatives.

Green Jobs Plan

A presentation on the Department's work on *Green Jobs – Environmental Revegetation and Rehabilitation Fund* provided information about the opportunity for Aboriginal communities in the Great Southern, Peel and Wheatbelt regions to get involved in the plan and access funding.

Employment opportunities will be created through funding on-ground works that form part of revegetation and rehabilitation projects. The Department will distribute detailed information about the Fund and liaise directly with interested members.

Hon Dave Kelly, Minister for Water

Minister Kelly met with members and provided an update on priorities of the new Government including water resources legislation reform. Current legislation will address climate change by enabling water



licence allocations to be adjusted depending on the changing availability. The Minister noted that the RIWI Act is inadequate when seeking to develop Strategic Aboriginal Water Reserves. Minister Kelly committed to sharing more detail on the principles of the new bill with the group.

Members noted the need for the legislation to consider the drying climate and the need to manage water sustainably. Members also highlighted the need for the Department to improve its cultural competency and have more discussions around the cultural and spiritual values related to water.

Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson, Minister for Environment

Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson, Minister for Environment and Climate Action sent her apologies. Cameron Barnes (Environmental advisor) and Marije Van Hemert (Climate change advisor) represented the Minister.

Members were informed about key priorities in the environment portfolio which include focus on learning how best to consult and seek feedback from Traditional Owners when developing and/or expanding new maritime and terrestrial parks. The Minister wants to include local communities into management programs via links to Aboriginal Ranger programs and focus on young, marginalised members of the community. The Government is seeking to build knowledge of biodiversity across the state and is looking to consult with community on the native vegetation policy.

Members highlighted the importance of working with local groups in landscape restoration and aligning cultural ecological knowledge and practices with western scientific data for successful management approach. They also noted the challenges associated with reporting requirements for various funding programs and emphasised the need for more support.