



7 September 2021

Department of Finance  
WA Government  
Optima Centre, 16 Parkland Rd  
Osborne Park WA 6017

By email: [cspp@finance.wa.gov.au](mailto:cspp@finance.wa.gov.au)

To whom it may concern

### **State Commissioning Strategy for Community Services: Discussion Paper**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the development of the State Commissioning Strategy for Community Services.

Empowered Communities East Kimberley (ECEK) is a collaboration between 25 Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations based in the East Kimberley, supported by a neutral backbone organisation Binarri-binyja yarrowoo Aboriginal Corporation (BBY). ECEK has articulated a shared vision of Aboriginal-led development in the East Kimberley in our [Regional Development Agenda](#).

Further information about Empowered Communities East Kimberley and our ACCO members is available on our [website](#).

An explanation of the Empowered Communities model is found in the [Empowered Communities: Empowered Peoples Design Report](#). Especially relevant to the development of the State Commissioning Strategy is Chapter 4 of the Design Report: Incentives supporting reform (pp.50-77), including:

- Pooled funding to support cross-government investment in place-based, Aboriginal-led development agendas (p.61)
- Indigenous people and organisations increasingly driving development, with an expectation that NGO providers work to transfer capability and exit a region over time (p.64)
- Purchasing and co-purchasing arrangements to support partnerships between Aboriginal leaders and government to close the gap in regions (p.66)

In the five years we have been implementing the Empowered Communities model locally in the East Kimberley, we have accrued experience in the following areas of relevance to the development of the State Commissioning Strategy for Community Services:

- Developed robust governance arrangements to support Joint Decision-Making between Aboriginal people in the East Kimberley and the Commonwealth Government on investment made in the region through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) (a program administered by the National Indigenous Australians Agency) (further information, including a confidential copy of the JDM Implementation Guide, can be provided on request)

- To date, by convening community panels and using our participatory governance structures, we have assessed **\$23,749,642** worth of Government investment in the region through the Joint Decision Making process, ensuring that investment meets community need
- Worked with NIAA to co-commission new services funded as a result of joint decision-making processes, ensuring local Aboriginal voices are included in the provider selection while conflicts of interest are managed (see [here](#) for further details)
- Developed the [Empowered Communities East Kimberley Partnership Principles](#), which set out how Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations in the East Kimberley would like to work with non-Aboriginal organisations in developing and delivering services to Aboriginal people in the East Kimberley.

At a high level, we make the following observations in relation to the discussion paper:

- Further work is required to align the State Commissioning Strategy for Community Services with the recently released Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy, including:
  - Commissioning Strategy Discussion Paper defines commissioning as a partnership between government, service providers and services users, whereas the Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy and the expectation of Empowered Communities East Kimberley would be to see commissioning conducted through a partnership between government and Aboriginal leadership in a region (through regional governance arrangements and place-based partnerships under Closing the Gap)
  - A system-wide approach to strategic commissioning can only be conducted in place, at the intersection between whole-of-government and whole-of-community
  - A system-wide approach to commissioning necessarily considers Commonwealth and philanthropic investment, as well as WA Government; this requires architecture, such as a regional negotiation table in the Empowered Communities model, to bring funders to the table in a structured dialogue with regional leadership
- Strategic commissioning should sit within a partnership approach to policy development, so Aboriginal leaders have the opportunity to influence parameters within which services are commissioned
- The impending expiry of a significant number of contracts under the DCSP Policy presents an opportunity for the WA Government to trial shared decision making with Aboriginal leadership and Empowered Communities East Kimberley about whether the funded services meet the needs of Aboriginal people in the East Kimberley.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this submission further with departmental officials as you finalise the State Commissioning Strategy.



To discuss this further, please contact me by email on [ceo@bby.org.au](mailto:ceo@bby.org.au) or by phone on (08) 9169 2272.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christy Hawker".

Christy Hawker  
**Chief Executive Officer**