

20 September 2019

Committee Secretary
Department of the Senate
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Canberra ACT 2600

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To Whom It May Concern

Select Committee on the effectiveness of the Australian Government's Northern Australia agenda

This submission is made on behalf of the Regional Implementation Committee (**RIC**) which is a Pilbara based forum that was formally established in 2016 and is made up of representatives from eight Pilbara Traditional Owner groups and Rio Tinto. The RIC was formed with the aim of promoting the wellbeing of Pilbara Aboriginal People through employment and wealth creation opportunities, focusing in particular on regional standards of employment and training and business development.

Commenting on the Northern Australia Agenda

You have asked interested parties to comment on the Northern Australian Agenda (first released in 2015), in particular the:

- facilitation of public and private investment in infrastructure and economic development;
- social benefit arising from that investment for Northern Australians, in particular First Nations people;
- funding models and policy measures that capture the full value of existing and emerging industries;
- measures taken to develop an appropriately skilled workforce;
- emerging national and international trends and their impact on the Northern Australia agenda; and any related matters.

We note that the Northern Australian Agenda is 4 years into a 20-year plan for investment and support to grow “the North” (loosely defined as all areas of Australia located above the Tropic of Capricorn) through 6 key pillars:

1. A trade and investment gateway;
2. A more diversified northern economy;
3. Indigenous entrepreneurship and businesses;
4. World-class infrastructure;
5. Water infrastructure investment; and
6. Research and innovation

Outline of the RIC's comments and recommendations regarding the Northern Australian Agenda

1. **The Northern Australian Infrastructure Facility (NAIF) has allocated large sums of money into building roads and infrastructure throughout Northern Australia. However, much of the road building contracts are being allocated to companies based outside the region.** There could be a greater emphasis on using local (Indigenous, wherever possible) contractors to build up capability and transferable skills in the region. This also means the money is more likely to stay in the region and be spent in associated businesses.
2. **The RIC members have a strong interest in strategic and thoughtful investment in the Pilbara region,** with a particular focus on diversifying job opportunities, building up capabilities and skills for Indigenous businesses across all sectors, supporting the establishment of a School of Mines in the Pilbara and preparing for future jobs beyond automation. In the Pilbara, four major industries co-exist - mining, agriculture, fisheries/aquaculture and tourism. The Pilbara Indigenous groups could benefit greatly by government focusing on these areas in developing our economy.
3. **The Pilbara Aboriginal People would greatly benefit from a legislatively enacted Indigenous Business Incubator (IBI),** to assist with incubation programs to allow private companies and municipal entities, public institutions i.e. colleges / universities access to some of the non-mainstream ideas of Indigenous businesses and entrepreneurs. Commercial funding assistance could also be acquired through this framework, moving away from a capital style investment model such as the Indigenous bank structures that only lend according to low risk and high return principles. In this situation, the IBI could act less as a lender and have more of a mentor role.
4. **The RIC calls for greater support of and investment in government entities such as Supply Nation and Indigenous Business Australia.** There is a serious movement in the Pilbara towards an Aboriginal Industry. The first step in supporting such an industry is to support the existing entities established to assist Pilbara Aboriginal businesses. It would be a game changer to have Supply Nation and Indigenous Business Australia (IBA) take a more proactive, less analytical approach.
5. **The importance of improving the current engagement, structure and funding of representative bodies, including land councils and native title bodies such as prescribed body corporates.** The difficulty that most Native Title Representative Bodies have in relation to proper engagement with all forms of Governments is our deficiency around a well-managed and co-ordinated approach to engagement. Poor funding of PBCs means that only immediate needs are being met and more meaningful, long-term interactions, regional collaborations and delivery of outcome driven services are difficult to co-ordinate.
6. **Recognising the enormous value and opportunity of creating and supporting regional Indigenous forums and organisations like the RIC.** Meaningful government engagement and collaboration with these organisations will enable them to provide an authentic voice for the region and empower them to find community-based solutions to entrenched social and economic issues.

7. **More could be done in the collection of comparative data** that can accurately document outcomes in social indicators for Pilbara Aboriginal People in education, jobs, health, housing and crime and be used to make evidence-based decisions on investment and funding in the region.

The RIC Report – a baseline study of social indicators for Pilbara Aboriginal People (and what we can learn from that)

In 2017 the RIC commissioned Professor John Taylor to conduct an analysis of change in social indicators for Pilbara Aboriginal people from 2001 - 2016, around health; education, employment and training; participation in regional labour markets; housing; and crime and justice. The findings therefore provide a measure of the overall socio-economic impact on Pilbara Aboriginal people over the course of the so-called mining boom.

The Report (RIC Report) was formally released in November 2018 and provides detailed information that empowers the RIC in its strategic thinking and representation to industry, government and others as it seeks to advance social and economic development for Pilbara Aboriginal people. A copy of the RIC Report is **enclosed** with this submission, along with a RIC Report Key Findings and Infograph summary.

As shown, some aspects of our lives have improved, but the key message from this report is that in many respects, outcomes are worse now than they were before the mining boom. As representatives of eight Traditional Owner groups in the Pilbara, we feel that this failure to 'raise all boats' on the back of massive government and private sector investment in our region is an indication that current systems of engagement with Traditional Owners are ineffective.

We, as the Traditional Owner representatives of the RIC would like to submit the RIC Report and its supporting key findings as essential empirical evidence of the urgent need for action in the areas discussed above.

We further include below the current priorities of the Regional Implementation Committee and its Traditional Owner members in relation to education, training and jobs by way of demonstrating which issues merit attention from all sectors of industry and government.

Education and Training

- Investment in a Pilbara based School of Mines
- Preparing for future jobs beyond automation
- Identification and alleviation of circumstances that prevent people from engaging in employment, education or training in the Pilbara, for example adverse health issues, patchy school attendance, growing need for carer support, incarceration.
- Supporting Indigenous led initiatives to increase school attendance, including scholarships, culturally appropriate boarding facilities, tutoring/ homework classes and training of Indigenous teachers.
- Increased access to and engagement with family based financial literacy programs.

Jobs

- Investment in Ranger programs throughout the Pilbara, to ensure care of country, biodiversity and biosecurity.
- Investment in mapping the Aboriginal economy, support for Indigenous-lead review of Aboriginal businesses and capabilities in the region.
- Specific training that meets needs of the region, including training young people to deliver aged care services, support and develop community owned businesses.
- Prioritise local Indigenous procurement.
- Facilitate and support joint ventures.

You are welcome to contact the Regional Implementation Committee for further comment and we look forward to participating in public hearings should the Senate Select Committee wish the RIC to be involved.

Yours sincerely



pp Sara Slattery

On behalf of the Traditional Owner representatives of the Regional Implementation Committee

Represented by Banjima, Puutu Kunti Kuruma Pinikura (PKKP), Ngarlawangga, Ngarluma, Nyiyaparli, Robe River Kuruma, Yinhawangka and Yindjibarndi Pilbara Traditional Owner groups.