

Response to Questions on Notice

Questions on Notice: *“You mentioned resources. What sort of discussions are you having with government, if you are, about resourcing the land councils? Speaking from a personal observation point of view, it seems to me that the package that was put together 33 years ago is not delivering now in terms of funding of land councils, staffing and resourcing. Is there some sort of conversation going on about that? Have you had that conversation?”*

NSWALC is the largest self-funded Aboriginal representative organisation in Australia and has a key role to play in formulating economic opportunities for Aboriginal peoples and communities in NSW.

NSWALC continues to advocate for mechanisms within legislation and policy which are consistent with and support the principle of self-determination to enable Aboriginal people to determine their cultural, political and economic status as espoused in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

NSWALC continues to strongly advocate for Government to support the intent of the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983* and return land to Aboriginal Land Councils as compensation for past dispossession.

Aboriginal Land Councils continue to remain relevant and provide a legitimate community based mechanism for decision making and governance structures which provide the opportunity for involvement and decision making by Aboriginal people at a local level.

The geographical reach of the Aboriginal Land Council network and the asset base both in land and people present a significant opportunity for Government to work in true partnership in seeking to achieve real outcomes for Aboriginal peoples and communities.

In relation to funding and resourcing Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs) NSWALC has:

- Invested in Economic Development, through an initiative of \$16 million over five years providing start-up capital, financial training and business development to turn Aboriginal local knowledge into successful and sustainable businesses;
- Invested in Community Development, through the Community Fund which derives monies from the community development levy mechanism from land dealings matched with contributions by NSWALC, and makes funds available to less advantaged LALCs for the acquisition of land or for the undertaking of land management activities;
- Invested in Water and Sewerage infrastructure for discrete Aboriginal communities, through a \$100 million commitment over 25 years matched by the NSW Government;
- Invested in Education through tertiary scholarships which provide an opportunity for Aboriginal students to further their education;
- Provided support to families through community benefit schemes such as the NSWALC Funeral Fund; and
- Provided annual funding to all funded LALCs to assist them meet their administrative expenses.

Resourcing Aboriginal Land Councils

The NSW Government should commit to building upon the existing land council structure as they have expertise in their focus areas and legitimacy within their communities.

As highlighted throughout this Inquiry, Aboriginal Land Councils present a unique opportunity to drive change for Aboriginal peoples if they are properly resourced. With sufficient funding LALCs will be able to facilitate economic development from their landholdings and further contribute to their local and regional economies.

LALCs continue to provide services to their local communities. NSWALC supports these initiatives through the development and implementation of state-wide strategies as identified above.

The NSW Government should support these initiatives and work in partnership with the Aboriginal Land Councils to further strengthen this network. This can be done through:

- Building on and resourcing initiatives already identified by Aboriginal Land Councils
- Resourcing programs which strengthen governance through training and mentoring
- Resourcing programs which support Aboriginal employment in professional fields within LALC core business e.g.- Surveying and Planning
- Resourcing programs which strengthen capacity of LALCs to facilitate economic development and foster long-term relationships with local government and businesses.
- Funding the Aboriginal community controlled sector to support training, mentoring and professional development of Aboriginal peoples. This has the potential to contribute to the number of skilled Aboriginal workers and increasing confidence to work in mainstream industries
- Resourcing the determination and/or negotiation of outstanding Aboriginal land claims and surveying approved land claims
- Funding NSWALC and LALCs to engage with experts to explore potential economic development opportunities.