

Swan Valley Nyungah Community

Indigenous Communities and Sustainability (pp 61 – 64)

Par 1:

Aboriginal people and their cultures are a unique and invaluable part of the State of Western Australia. They have continuing rights and responsibilities as the first peoples of Western Australia, including traditional ownership and connection to land and waters.

While we are glad to see that this paper is recognising our Links, Ties and Connections to our Land and Water, and while we take our responsibilities as Caretakers to our Land very seriously, we have not had cooperation or understanding from State Governments when we try and protect the Sacredness of our Land and Waterways.

Par 2:

For Indigenous Western Australians, sustainability touches diverse areas including: Indigenous 'country' management, biodiversity, conservation, Protection of spiritual cultural heritage, and the essential preconditions of employment, housing, infrastructure, education, substance abuse, domestic violence, and safety and security and economic development. All of these issues interrelate and influence each other to affect Indigenous advancement.

We have been here since the Beginning of Time. It is the ignorance of whitefellas that has forced us into poverty. We know our Religion and Culture. It is because our Religion and Culture not recognised (except in words) by Government that we are having so many problems.

Par 3:

Wealth creation in general Western Australian community is fundamentally important in the process of addressing issues facing Aboriginal people. Certainty for industry's development proposals and security for Aboriginal People's cultural heritage and values must be equally respected within overall development of the State.

We noticed that you put 'wealth creation' first. As long as that is your first consideration, you and the State will remain poor, no matter how much money you have. Our Spiritual Dreaming is wise. You should be taking advice of the Elders of this State and not be swayed by developers, mining interests and Government advisers. If you do the right thing by the Land it will do the right thing by you.

Par 4:

Circumstances of Aboriginal people can differ significantly between regions and localities. Regional and local approaches are required to address issues that impact on Aboriginal communities, families and individuals. To achieve improvement, Government and Aboriginal people need to work together in partnership and share responsibilities. It is only through this process that sustainability can be achieved.

We note that you understand that circumstances can differ. However, your recommendations further on do not reflect these sentiments. Negotiations need to take place with the Elders of an Area. A regional approach will simply disempower those who keep the Laws and Sacredness of their area.

Par 6:

However, there are also promising opportunities for sustainability in Indigenous communities arising from:

The signing of the Statement of Commitment to a New and Just Relationship between the Government of Western Australia and Aboriginal Western Australians

We would like to know who has signed this agreement and what does the agreement say? Are all Grassroots Mainstream Aborigines going to have input into this agreement or is it just going to be signed by Indigenous people chosen by the Government?

The groundswell of the Indigenous community-driven movement towards managing Indigenous 'country' according to cultural groupings and on a regional 'country' basis.

The groundswell has come from Government policy and, while we have always worked according to our 'cultural groupings' and 'country', the Government is now defining what these groupings should be. This is just another example of how the whitefella dictates to us listening to us.

The investment of Native Title Representatives Bodies in community negotiations, governance and representative structures.

This would be fine if the Government wasn't trying to decimate the Single Native Title Claims Group so that the only 'representatives' were those of the Government's choice.

The new and unique collaboratively knowledge-creating work of environmentalists, ecologists and Indigenous traditional owners that result from actual Indigenous community interaction with Indigenous Lands.

Many environmentalists and ecologists are hired by developers and mining interests to further the interests of the greedy. There should be more than 'Indigenous community interaction with Indigenous Lands.' We have had that since the Beginning of Time. These 'scientists' must understand that we carry a wealth of Knowledge about our Land and Waterways and they must learn to listen. Many currently do not.

The growth in mining company initiatives for training and employment of Indigenous people from the regions.

Many of these 'initiatives' were 'forced' upon mining companies because the land was stolen from the Aboriginal People and in order to make it look all right, they offer crumbs back. This has not resulted in better health or lifestyle for our People.

Par 7:

In accordance with Statement of Commitment to a New and Just relationship between the Government of Western Australia and Aboriginal Western Australians, the Government will work with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission to:

- *Agree on a set of principles and a process for the negotiation of a Statewide framework that can facilitate negotiated agreements at the local and regional level.*
- *Negotiate a new approach in Aboriginal affairs policy and administration in Western Australia based on regional agreements.*
- *Enhance negotiated outcomes that protect and respect the inherent rights of Aboriginal people and to significantly improve the health, education, living standards and wealth of Aboriginal people.*

First of all, this is the whitefella way of doing things, not the Blackfella way. By working from the top down (ATSSIC) with a group that does not represent the majority of Mainstream Grassroots Aboriginal People, and thus does not represent the majority of Caretakers of the Land and Waterways, you are once again defining what is best for us instead of listening to our Wisdom and Knowledge.

You are not respecting our inherent rights – you are stomping on them.

Par 8:

We note that Steve Kinnane's background paper *Beyond the Boundaries – Exploring Indigenous Sustainability Issues Within a Regional Focus* 'proposes that processes for strategic policy development be anchored in community-based programs.' However, you then ignore his recommendation and talk about instigating 'a pilot project for a state funded Aboriginal Country Management Program building upon existing Aboriginal land and sea management programs, such as in the Kimberly region: Indigenous Regional Sustainability Strategies and development of Indigenous Sustainability Strategies contributing to regional agreements that are part of the Statement of Commitment.'

The system recommended in this section does not address the Blackfella way of doing things. The recommendations ignore or convolute Steve Kinnane's premise that 'processes for strategic policy development be anchored in community-based programs'.

Once again, the recommendations in this paper is whitefella driven and are totally reliant on ATSSIC's input, ignoring the Grassroots Mainstream Aboriginal People. This process will further erode Indigenous Ties to the Land and Waterways and, thus, the Culture and Religion of the Aboriginal People.

Par 9 & 10:

'...it is intended to include Aboriginal storie in the 'sense of place' document to be created for each region (in the country and city). Indigenous regional sustainability can begin around the Aboriginal stories and history that are being developed as part of the Regional Sustianabilty Strategies, other Aboriginal arts and cultural tourism projects, and the Aboriginal history project being conducted under the supervision of Professor Geoffrey Bolton, Murdoch University...'

This seems to be in direct contravention of the *Aboriginal Heritage Act, 1972*. It shows absolutely know understanding of the Connections to the Land and Waterways and further disempowers Aboriginal People, their Culture and their Religion.

This whole section shows a total misunderstanding and disregard for the Knowledge, Culture and Religion of Aboriginal People. It delegates us to a second-class position in this society where we will continue to be dictated to by Government policies that are based on development at a cost to our Land and Waterways. When will you properly consult with Grassroots Aboriginal People and not Government Departments and Agencies which have a totally different agenda to that of Mainstream Aboriginal People.