

DRAFT

**State Infrastructure Strategy –
Aboriginal Advisory Project**



Stakeholder Consultation Report



Prepared by IPS Management Consultants

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1 THE PROJECT

Summary

Infrastructure Western Australia (IWA) was established in 2019, to provide advice and support to the WA Government on relevant infrastructure needs and priorities whilst improving transparency in decision making. The primary focus is the creation of a 20-year State Infrastructure Strategy (SIS) that prepares for the impact of population growth to ensure the economic prosperity of the State by planning for the future need.

IWA engaged IPS Management consultants (IPS) to conduct stakeholder interviews with up to ten Aboriginal leaders, who were diverse in gender, location, expertise and age; and explore feedback against the proposed blueprint. The objective of the engagement was to undertake a strategic review of the opportunities to improve Aboriginal considerations in the infrastructure planning and decision-making process. The review will be used to inform recommendations within the SIS.

The key opportunity areas identified are:

- Global location.
- Serving emerging consumer class.
- Promoting and leveraging Aboriginal cultural heritage and enterprise.
- Approaching the technology frontier.
- Transition to net zero emissions; and
- Value adding of strategic commodities.

The purpose of this project is twofold. The first component is to enable IWA to form a position on Aboriginal matters and infrastructure responses within the SIS and ensure they are appropriately articulated and referenced. The second component is to develop an Aboriginal engagement approach to support public consultation and SIS roll out that embraces meaningful and effective communication with the right stakeholders (individuals and groups).

There are two streams of work as part of this project.

Stream One: Strengthening and translating the SIS vision and key opportunity areas.

1. Ensure appropriate consideration of Aboriginal matters opportunities and culture are adequately provided for in the SIS.
2. Ensure Aboriginal culture heritage is appropriately promoted and leveraged to further enhance Western Australia's cultural identity and domestic and international recognition is achieved.
3. Grow and support Aboriginal enterprise and business opportunities including integrating Aboriginal skills and experience into mainstream practice for e.g., social enterprise and land stewardship.

Stream 2: Framing identified issues and potential infrastructure responses.

This stream includes considering:

- Aboriginal procurement solutions and opportunities.
- Inclusion of Aboriginal-led design and engagement throughout major infrastructure project; development and delivery.
- Infrastructure requirements (both built and non-built) of remote Aboriginal communities.

- Sectoral-based infrastructure options and cross-sector considerations (for example, long-term justice prevention strategies that incorporate education, health, cultural, housing and economic solutions); and
- Alignment with State and Federal government plans, strategies and reports such as “Closing the Gap”.

The SIS discussion paper, *A Stronger Tomorrow*, identifies ten themes by sector that will have a significant impact on shaping the prosperity of the State in the next 20 years.

Below is a high-level snapshot of key themes identified, during stakeholder engagement, that align to the ten identified sectoral matters:

1. Population: The general population in the State is growing and most reside in the Perth and south west region. This trend needs to be modified to encourage residents in other regional areas to enable economic growth and job security. Investment in infrastructure is thought to encourage people to reside in regions and meet their needs.
2. Economy: The economy is heavily dependent on the resource sector and needs to diversify into other areas, such as cultural tourism. The concept of cultural tourism and the arts is heavily emphasised as a key focus to securing economic opportunity for Aboriginal people. This is also linked to settling native title claims where traditional owner communities have the desire and resources to establish cultural tourism ventures.
3. Environment: The changing environment is challenging for communities and impacts on food production and water availability. Weather conditions (cyclones, droughts, flooding, fires) can have severe consequences to community access.
4. Water: This is a critical consideration for remote communities where access to fresh water is entirely dependent on well-maintained infrastructure.
5. Energy: Shifting towards renewable energy presents new challenges such as affordability and reliability, especially in very remote communities. Investment in infrastructure would be essential. Provision of essential power services to remote communities is an ongoing challenge and the full potential of improving reliability through technology could significantly impact remote communities such as solar power and getting ‘off the grid’ to be more sustainable.
6. Transport: Focusing on zero emission vehicles is appropriate for well serviced areas but needs to be considered in regional and remote locations where long distances separate services and would require multiple charging stations to suit need.
7. Health: The shift towards telehealth, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic has enabled services to be provided despite lockdown but is entirely dependent on reliable internet connection, access to computers and technical expertise
8. Education and training: There is an increasing pressure on TAFE and universities to adapt their teaching to an ever-changing situation and ensure that anyone who wants to access an education can, regardless of their location putting reliance on internet and computer access. There is also a need for providing training in specific areas related to public services such as health. The feedback received from stakeholders had a depth of feeling and focus with some clear areas of consideration as well as some suggested solutions that worked towards self-determination and culturally appropriate educational environments.

There is a complexity to the various relationships and the operating environment which should not be minimised as a potential inhibitor for future success and our recommendation is that any agreed solutions need to be navigated with the utmost of care and interdependency awareness.



State and its departments are committed to delivering solutions for Aboriginal people, but the key issue is a lack of consistent and culturally appropriate processes for consultation regarding issues that affect their lives. Face to face meetings, yarning circle engagements and more non- traditional communication methods could be tapped into, to fully explore and leverage the knowledge and expertise of the Aboriginal communities and in a human centred/co-designed manner.

Aboriginal Communities are diverse throughout Western Australia and a one-size fits all approach to stakeholder engagement and embedding in local decision making may not have the intended impact of empowering communities to drive positive change and outcomes. There needs to be a well- considered and fit for purpose approach to maximise the benefits to all community members both Aboriginal and non- Aboriginal. Having flexibility in engagement and approach to capitalise Aboriginal economic development is essential to the success of the planning process.

The deliverables of the engagement will be critical in enabling IWA to form a position on Aboriginal matters and infrastructure responses within the SIS.

2 ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

The engagement approach took in due consideration of how the SIS can accommodate cultural sensitivities and the impact of intended and unintended consequences. The approach gave attention, to effective stakeholder's engagement, where Aboriginal communities and leaders are at the center of the evaluation process. It is integral to success, that engagement creates the conditions for stakeholders to participate in building shared knowledge more meaningfully and taking collective action.

Co-design

The concept of Co-design means that there is participation in the process by stakeholders in creating services and products that they would utilize. It is facilitated by 5 key principles (NCOSS, 2020)

1. Inclusivity
2. Respectful
3. Participative
4. Iterative
5. Outcomes focused.

The additional benefit from including the end user in the process, is the creation of a culturally safe and empowering environment.

The engagement approach has been crafted through a partnership with Moodjar consulting, who conducted interviews with relevant stakeholder. IPS, Moodjar and IWA worked in a co- designed manner to determine the primary purpose and focus of the engagement, key lines of enquiry and methodological approach.

This approach ensured all stakeholder arrangements were relevant and valid in establishing a comprehensive understanding of Aboriginal perspectives and considerations to State infrastructure.

Key lines of enquiry

- What are the strengths and challenges in Aboriginal engagement with Government?
- Strengths and deficiencies in WA infrastructure, as they relate to Aboriginal communities.
- How to prioritise Aboriginal cultural, enterprise and employment opportunities, in infrastructure.



Data sources

- Analysis of client data and reports forwarded by departmental staff.
- Qualitative analysis of interviews with key Aboriginal stakeholders, as pre-approved by IWA.
- Interviews with other key consultants working on the SIS.

Inclusion of First Nations people in any projects is integral to the authenticity of engagement and a successful outcome. IPS work with and for our clients in a co-design manner, ensuring recognition of cultural protocols and competency in all that we do. We provide government, corporate and not-for-profit organisations across the country with innovative Indigenous Engagement Strategies.” Jahna Cedar

Data Management

There are several data sets that contributed to the analysis. Any existing data provided to IPS remains the property of the provider and, if included, its source will be noted within the engagement report. All data generated including interviews and workshops is considered raw data and remains the property of IPS.

To clarify:

- Any existing data provided by the Department for the evaluation is owned and remains the property of the Department.
- Any existing data provided by any other key stakeholder is owned and remains their property.
- Any data generated through engagement - interviews and workshops is considered raw data and remains the property of IPS. IPS will not use this data for any other purpose. Its retention is to ensure protection of anonymity and confidentiality.
- The report generated for the engagement is copyright property of IPS and provided to IWA without restriction on use - including publication. Sharing the report with other stakeholders is at IWA's discretion. If IWA does not make the report publicly available, IPS recommends that a summary be made available to stakeholders as a gesture of good faith for their participation.

3 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Discovery interviews were conducted, with up to ten identified key Aboriginal stakeholders to explore and understand current responses, priorities, barriers, and opportunities to infrastructure in remote Aboriginal communities, in a culturally sensitive and appropriate manner.

IWA also requested IPS contact other key stakeholders, to provide strategic alignment on infrastructure responses and priorities. The other key stakeholders included:

- GREX Consulting to knowledge-share on telecommunication issues in remote Aboriginal communities.
- Tessele Consultants to knowledge-share on water issues in remote Aboriginal communities; and
- Ink Strategy to ensure Aboriginal themes, references and terminology are appropriately reflected throughout authoring of the SIS.

Considerations for future engagements include a deeply respectful understanding that these communities and their residents, are very remote and, for many, English is a second or even third



language. Also, feedback was received that authentic consultation with Aboriginal people, requires an investment of time to build rapport and relationships, and should not be rushed to meet western expectations and deadlines. This creates a sense of tokenism and disrespect to the person/s being engaged.

Recruitment of participants and incentives

Aboriginal Stakeholders

The names and contact details of ten Aboriginal stakeholders, from across WA, were pre-approved by IWA. IPS sent an email invitation and follow up phone call invitation to each identified person, inviting them to participate. The email included an overview of the engagement and consent form. Interviews were booked at a time mutually agreeable, either through zoom or phone.

WA consultants

IWA completed an email introduction between IPS and identified consultants working on key sectors of the SIS. Microsoft teams was then used as a platform to conduct discussions on relevant topics and themes consistent across the individual sector and Aboriginal communities.

Payment for participation

Aboriginal community stakeholders that participated in interviews were paid \$300 for their expert advice and insights.

IWA consultants were not given any payment for participation.

Interview guide

IPS sought to explore not only relevant feedback on infrastructure needs in remote Aboriginal communities but consider the relationship between Government and first nations people through culturally appropriate communication methodologies.

Note: In addition to information emails and consent forms, each stakeholder was introduced to the SIS to set the scene for the interview. Below are the interview questions utilised.

Aboriginal Engagement with Government

1. What do you see as the strengths to engaging between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organisations and stakeholders? Give a good example of positive exchange and outcomes achieved.
2. What are some of the challenges to engaging between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people within the context of achieving goals? Give some examples if you can.
3. What are some of the things people often forget when doing cross-cultural work?
4. In terms of consultation in a broader context, what has worked as best practice for you when multiple parties needed to compromise? Detail, whether the outcome was positive or negative.
5. What impact has the removal of the DIA had on decision making with the State Government?
6. What would any consistent State-wide consultation frameworks look like?



SIS feedback

1. What are some of the most important issues facing Aboriginal people and their outcomes over the next 20 years?
2. How can Aboriginal cultural, enterprise and employment opportunities be recognised and prioritised?
3. What do you think are the greatest infrastructure needs and priorities across the regions and Perth?
4. What, if any, other infrastructure sectors should be addressed in the strategy?

4 REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Deliverable	Draft Due	Final Due
Project Plan	8 February 21	10 February 21
Report (proposed)	15 March 21	24 March 21

5 PROJECT SCHEDULE AND TIMELINE

Key milestone or deliverable	Timeframe	Responsible party
Project inception meeting	w/c 1 February 21	IPS
Relevant documentation provided	w/c 1 February 21	Beth Beere (IWA)
Development of Project Plan	w/c 8 February 21	IPS
Literature Review	26 February 21	IPS
Stakeholder engagement	8 March 21	IPS
Delivery of draft stakeholder report	17 March 21	IPS
Response to draft report	19 March 21	IWA
Delivery of final stakeholder report	24 March 21	IPS

6 CONSULTATION FINDINGS

Living in remote communities can present all manner of challenges for residents meeting their basic needs as well as their economic aspirations. Water, energy, housing, and telecommunications often require innovative solutions tailored to specific community circumstances. To determine the right solution, and deliver the best possible outcome requires effective community engagement, and local capacity building.

Aboriginal Engagement

Infrastructure is essential to support social services and improve Aboriginal wellbeing, but it needs to be done in a co-designed decision-making process that embraces self-determination and empowerment of first nations people and their communities. It is “*The systematic process of creating new solutions with people not for them, involving citizens and communities in policy and service development*” (Christian Bason, 2010)

“To me, a process of developing a state-wide consultation framework should be perceived as agreement-making. It would enable Aboriginal organisations to determine meaningful development and create agendas for themselves. The state government would be held accountable to the consensus and agreement negotiated in this process.”

Aboriginal stakeholder

Whilst interviews with stakeholders were successful, they were not without challenges. It was difficult to gain a response from the complete list of community members in the short timeframe, noting the impact of sorry business, prior commitments, and lore season in the Pilbara, but some strong feedback was received. The overarching consensus on Aboriginal engagement is that a co-design approach, as a potential infrastructure response by IWA, is a strong step forward in the right direction, with minor recommendations on cultural protocols and authority to be considered. The cultural protocols that need consideration are the following:

- Understanding cultural protocols such as Welcome to Country opposed to Acknowledgement of country.
- Who has the cultural authority to speak at a specific region and location and how do you confirm representation?
- What is the best method of engagement for the specific stakeholder group? One on one interviews, yarning circles, surveys, videos etc.
- Have you obtained the necessary approvals before going to community?
- Understanding the impact of sorry business and that meetings may be postponed with very little notice.
- Cultural lore practices and access to community by service providers
- The nature and extent of the diversity within the Aboriginal community and often remoteness of the communities.

One of the considerations of the SIS needs to be the importance of time. To effectively consult within the Aboriginal community there needs to be a process of building trust and rapport and this can take a considerable amount of time. Having 10 people speak on behalf of the State of Western Australia with a few weeks' notice is not the most effective consultation process to achieve Stream 1 & 2 of the program.

The most effective cultural and stakeholder engagement needs to be carefully considered enabling enough time, the correct stakeholders and a broad range of mediums to ensure the direction is given the due consideration required. The more time invested, the better the relationships and respect built with the department.

“Effective programs and services need to be designed, developed and implemented in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.” (Hicks, 2019)

During the initial stage of major infrastructure projects, an Aboriginal cultural process should be incorporated into the development strategy. This needs to occur to ensure an appropriate risk assessment is considered, during inception. The acknowledgment of the traditional owners is a sign of respect. It is recommended this be incorporated into the program of works and added in the project controls throughout the development of the infrastructure project. The infrastructure programs can educate and increase cultural knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal culture and the proud traditions in the Western Australian communities.

There was a strong desire expressed for more open dialogue and involvement with various infrastructure projects in WA, with Aboriginal stakeholders. Some major projects and priorities that were mentioned include:

- Urban Aboriginal housing to combat homelessness.
- Health and Aged Care facilities in the city for Aboriginal people.
- Yagan Square.
- The new Edith Cowan University campus, alongside the new cultural centre, in the Perth CBD.
- Water and sustainable living in remote areas.
- Social housing and maintenance in remote communities.

Participants expressed concern over certain elements of Yagan Square which do not clearly express Noongar Culture, especially to people who may not be aware of its principles. There is often a mistake that the statue is that of Yagan, but it is of Wirin. There are also seasonal principles to the space that are not clearly visible or explained to those not initiated into Noongar knowledge. Open and transparent engagement, from the beginning of major infrastructure initiatives is imperative, with Aboriginal community representatives, to mitigate cultural concerns like this arising.

There needs to be a defined and consistent consultation process with Aboriginal communities with major infrastructure projects to ensure Aboriginal heritage; is consistently and accurately represented. The most effective way to establish this engagement is through the market interaction process and request for tender phase of the construction project. Key stakeholders could be identified and invited to provide comment. Once a position has been established, broader community consultation should occur to ensure all Aboriginal community members can raise concerns or provide feedback of the direction of the Aboriginal representation within that infrastructure project. The stories need to be relayed in a culturally appropriate way and documented for generations to come to ensure a permanently record.

Historic approaches to Aboriginal policy were addressed, to remind Government to continue to deliver positive, cooperative approaches with communities:

“Engagement with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organisations and stakeholders creates important space for two-way dialogue and potential collaboration. This engagement should be far more than ‘consultation’ and acknowledge Aboriginal communities’ right to determine their own development.”



For example, to establish a new research project on Noongar governance of development in 2020, the dialogue between the [REDACTED] where I work as [REDACTED] the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council and our research partners at the Australian National University, allowed for two-way dialogue about Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal understandings and expertise of governance, but also acknowledged that Noongar people ultimately held the authority to determine the research project, its methodology and its impact.” Aboriginal stakeholder

When asked if IWA’s approach to ensure a standard of open co-design and community consultation is carried out, every person consulted agreed. There were also strong positive suggestions:

“Imagine a fringe festival type event for Aboriginal people, in a new cultural hub, where you can sell Aboriginal products, gifts, even coffee, water, catering. You can train up Aboriginal hospitality workers, artists, craftspeople, designers, event managers and more. There is a problem that I have with not engaging young people enough with these ideas. The majority of the designs would not have enough vibe with young people, without the involvement of young people. Indigenous-centric design, let’s look at case studies and look at how good or poor they are.” Aboriginal stakeholder

Others expressed support for models and approached:

“Gnarla Biddi is a great framework...works well for METRONET.” Aboriginal stakeholder

“Having an Aboriginal person to facilitate the discussion and understands walking in two worlds, not someone who [REDACTED] in your pocket.” Aboriginal stakeholder

“Yule River meeting in Hedland is a good example. Govt come and sit in the bush with our mob to yarn, our way, respecting our culture and protocols.” Aboriginal stakeholder

Feedback on the MetroNet Gnarla Biddi and Kaart Koort Waarnginy Aboriginal Engagement framework of the Metropolitan Redevelopment Authority (MRA) has found the success was dependent on the inclusion of Aboriginal stakeholders from the beginning of the project who were empowered with decision making authority and genuine interest to their lived experiences and expertise. The Pilbara also had a great example of co-design and respect for Aboriginal engagement, through their annual Yule River Meeting of over 400 Traditional owners with invited Government Representatives. This self-determined and Aboriginal lead initiative ensures cultural decision making whilst being a significant opportunity to build relationships.

We suggest more significant co-design and consultation for the duration of IWA’s legislative objectives and further investment to develop longer term relationships with various consultants as voices in their community. This rapid pulse survey approach often yields good results, but both IWA and Aboriginal people in WA can mutually benefit from a continued process of co-design to ensure maximum satisfaction and coherence of objectives across various infrastructure projects. The government’s role in regulating and holding the corporate sector to account on these matters is clear from the experience of participants. As an advisory body, IPS urge IWA to share this feedback with Government so that a plan to guide investment in Aboriginal community-controlled infrastructure is developed, to meet current and future social, economic and cultural needs.



A great, final quote to stimulate decision-making processes was:

“Go back to the old ways. Sit down in the creek and yarn. Go to people, not expect them to come to you. Build relationships, invest, and know it takes time and money. Be grass roots in your approach. [Aim to be] Non-judgemental.” Aboriginal stakeholder

Population and Housing

Aboriginal people make up 3% of the Australian population and 4% of the Western Australian population, with a median age of 23 years in 2016, substantially younger than non-Indigenous Australians who had a median age of 38. (Census: Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander population, 2017) Almost 13% of Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in WA.

By 2031, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is projected to increase to between 1,054,600 people and 1,100,400 people at an average annual growth rate of between 1.9% and 2.2% per year. In comparison, the average annual growth rate of the total Australian population is projected to be between 1.3% and 1.7% per year over the same period (*Population Projections, Australia, 2017 (base) to 2066 (cat. no. 3222.0)*).

Stakeholders spoke of their concerns of remote communities having population decrease, due to lack of resources, assets, and infrastructure. This results in a loss of family connection, cultural and spiritual relationships and possibly language and identity. Many Indigenous languages are already on the edge of extinction, with 250 recorded language prior to colonisation and only 60 of which are deemed “healthy” (Korff, 2020). Infrastructure considerations need to include language and culture centres, well maintained assets and access to regulated utilities and goods.

The other concern raised is the cost of living in remote communities with general stores charging considerably more than urban areas, operation of diesel generators and access to fuel for vehicle operation. The situation is so dire, that The Australian Parliament Indigenous Affairs Committee has launched an inquiry into food prices and food security in Remote Communities, from 2020 (MP, 2020). As a result, many community people are moving into towns, adding further pressure to local services.

“We have to wait a week to get a doctor appointment. Anyone would think we need to book before we get sick. Too many people but not enough doctors” Aboriginal stakeholder

Concerns were raised on social housing, affordability, and access. Many remote communities face issues with overcrowding, particularly due to the transient nature because of sorry business and lore ceremonies. Houses themselves are not at a standard conducive to the needs of Aboriginal people and are designed from a western perspective of what Government think Aboriginal people want. Exploration of culturally appropriate dwellings may include outdoor kitchens and fire pits for smoking rituals.

Rural issues on accommodation were impacted by the mining boom with private rentals reaching over \$2000 per week for rent. There is no incentive for people in social housing to gain meaningful employment, if it means they are at risk of losing their state government home and forced into an exorbitant and highly competitive rental market.

We didn’t want to get a job in the boom as we would lose our public housing yet not make enough money to pay the ridiculous private rental rates. Aboriginal stakeholder

Other issues raised included poor housing repairs and maintenance within community. The neglect of State housing in Aboriginal communities can be such that houses need to be declared unfit for human habitation. Shelter WA and the Department of Communities ran a forum in 2017 where “It was identified that the current process is very costly, inefficient and lacks transparency and accountability. Net of the



enormous costs to government of maintenance, the outcome for tenants is very poor. “ (WA, 2017) Stakeholders further described their vision for success with local employment opportunities, improved maintenance response times and a place based and localised view to cost effective works. There may be opportunities for community-based maintenance services (non-trade related i.e., handy man needs) that could provide employment and faster turnaround times to resolve some of the angst outlined. Other options for housing include supplying additional points for water access, for visitors and to limit impact of overcrowded homes.

Water and waste

Whilst it is noted that there is an ongoing challenge to the provision of essential water sources to remote Aboriginal communities, particularly around cost and geographical isolation, access to clean drinking water for wellness and health, is integral. A Pilbara based community is trucking in bottled water at present as their water plant has needed repair for an extended period. This is alarming considering an announcement from Royalties for Regions to invest \$12.1 Million over three years to upgrade water quality to remote communities. (Improving Water Quality in Remote Aboriginal Communities, 2017).

Remote communities should be regulated against The Australian drinking water guidelines, which outline the minimum standards for drinking water quality. Instead, history has shown presence of arsenic, E. coli and Naegleria, or the need to bring in water from other towns.

It is important to not only recognise that water is a necessity to life but that it needs to be of ‘quality’.

Other water-based concerns raised, during the consultations include:

- Impact on water supply during lore ceremonies and sorry business (systems not set up to cope with influx of numbers which results in sanitary problems)
- The need for regulation around water testing by contractors, and their response time to maintenance concerns
- Possibility for communal ablution blocks in communities to alleviate pressures on homes during peak cultural periods.
- Opportunity for apprenticeships or training to local residents on basic maintenance works in plumbing.
- Opportunity for rainwater harvesting

The impact of mining has seen a negative consequence to some waterways, including Weeli Wolli creek in the Pilbara. This is a culturally and spiritually significant site that is now being hit hard with salination problems, ceasing of spring flow, and death of native plants and wildlife. (EPA, 2018) Any future infrastructure development needs to be done in collaboration with traditional owners who know not only the stories of the area, but the environmental conditions and needs. The traditional owners are the first scientists, builders and knowledge holders for the area. They have ancestral ties and lived experience and can guide, inclusively, the best method of potential infrastructure in the area that may have mutual benefit. This also extends to the location of water tanks, and other systems, to ensure cultural practices and protocols of restricted access for male v. female cultural needs, are not impacted.

Mining could also assist communities with non-potable water, that could be utilised for irrigation, toilets, and dust suppression, therefore limiting the overuse of potable water (where available).



Energy and Telecommunications

Telecommunication facilities are vital to economic activity, business development, and relationship building. The availability and reliability of high-speed Internet also helps to ensure such affordances as distance-learning programs and effective telehealth services. In remote regions, telecommunications systems provide vital lifelines between communities. Anecdotal evidence suggests that appropriate connectivity-enhancing infrastructure can have a positive impact on educational outcomes, employee and business performance, and overall socio-economic productivity. One stakeholder queried why community phone boxes have been removed as for some people this was their only means of communication outside of town.

Poor access to mobile technology was also raised. Remote communities do not have access to face-to-face banking services, Centrelink, emergency services etc, and therefore rely heavily on the availability of mobile and internet connectivity. Not all community members utilise technology and more traditional communication methods, needs to remain in remote communities. Any improvement or solutions to technology must look to mitigate the need for significant specialised maintenance.

Stakeholders were asked, about the importance of alternative power sources. It was noted that power problems were not only a concern for remote communities, but for urban households also. Many remote communities are still running on diesel generators, particularly in the Pilbara and Kimberley regions, and yet they are in solar rich regions. Examples were provided on remote communities that had at one time utilised solar panels, however relevant training in the upkeep and maintenance of the systems were not afforded and therefore they failed. Any technology implemented needs a whole of life approach and incorporate ongoing maintenance and repairs to ensure the uptake of the technology is utilised to its full potential,

It is important to build sustainable and enterprising communities of Aboriginal people underpinned by appropriate 'fit for purpose' technology. The best outcomes for communities, service providers and funders arise when community residents themselves can make informed decisions about matters affecting their lives, and provided with the knowledge, skills and experience necessary to ensure greater self-reliance. Holistic localised planning enables all elements of infrastructure to be planned in an integrated way.

Pre-payment meters for energy consumption was raised on efficiency, but little knowledge was had on the effectiveness of the solution. The Regional Services Reform Unit was established "to drive major reforms to the delivery of services and infrastructure in regional and remote communities to achieve improved economic and social outcomes for Aboriginal People." (Searle, 2016) With limited research on the WA impact, IPS reviewed the consumer satisfaction on similar initiatives in the NT and QLD where it was found that while there was anecdotal evidence of customers going without electricity, a lack of transparency in costs and access to re-charge the accounts, there was also widespread support as it enabled budgeting and energy conservation. (QCOSS, 2014) The NT equivalent noted that their Indigenous Essential Services program services 72 remote communities and 66 outstations across the Territory and employs local people as Essential Services Operators to run its day-to-day services. (PowerWater, 2021)

Transport

The Manuwarra Red Dog Highway (MRDH, formerly Karratha – Tom Price Road) is a predominantly unsealed road linking the regional centres of Karratha and Tom Price in the Pilbara Region of Western Australia. The 269 km road provides crucial connectivity between these centres, as well as access to significant tourism destinations and mine sites in the region. The embracing of first nations people in place making, employment and educational opportunities on this project, is testament to positive inclusion and co-design.



The Bunbury Outer Ring Road is another project by Main Roads, which has incorporated Roeland mission and breakaway justice diversion programs, to provide employment and procurement opportunities, that result in long term social and economic opportunities for Aboriginal people and communities. Any further investment should take these learnings into consideration. Targets in employments and Aboriginal awareness and diversity and inclusion training could impact the mindset of public services. They need to develop pride and engagement with Aboriginal culture, cultural competency and accountability to set targets. Selling the success and value through the award systems and recognition system may be a positive outcome.

As an example, IPS facilitated a range of stakeholder engagement activities for the Bunbury Outer Ring Road project, the biggest public infrastructure project in the South West. In an effort to drive local and Aboriginal business opportunities, we built relationships across multiple levels of stakeholders including Government, Development Commissions, Tier 1 contractors, Main Roads WA, regional business networks and not for profits. IPS led the formation of the South West Aboriginal Business Consortium to drive Indigenous opportunity across this and other projects, in a co-designed and human centred process.

Many Aboriginal communities are isolated both socially and geographically during the wet season when flooding and cyclones close many of the access roads. During the dry season however, some communities are inundated by tourists, which put pressure on road conditions (especially if unsealed), amenities and utilities. Many remote communities do not have public transport. Further research needs to be undertaken to ensure the full economic potential including tourism can be leveraged through effective transport networks to remote areas and potential opportunities are identified.

Feedback was received, by stakeholders, on the MetroNet based works in Perth and the efficient connectivity it provides to road and rail users. Mention was also made of airport upgrades in regional areas. Items raised of concern include the impact of large trucks carrying mining equipment to the Pilbara, on road users, lack of access to communities during wet season and infrastructure impact on sites of cultural significance. Relationships need to be developed with traditional owner groups to ensure thorough heritage assessments are conducted, so as not to see destruction of sites.

A good example was the dialogue between Main Roads and Wintawarri Guruma on the Manuwarra Red dog highway route past Hamersley station. Main Roads state “We have been working with Yindjibarndi and Wintawari Guruma representative groups to understand cultural and social implications of the project, aiming for a positive and respectful relationship throughout the project lifecycle.” (Roads, 2020)

This area has numerous sacred sites. As such, traditional owners were able to negotiate with main roads on a change of route, to ensure protection.

Health

The holistic approach to health utilised by Aboriginal people needs to be recognised and offered through all health providers. This is a patient centric view, with culturally specific and sensitive software. “*True and lasting gains are made when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and individuals are front and centre of decision making and driving outcomes in their choices in respect to health care.*” (Cabinet, 2018) It is important that all health provisions approach health management beyond critical care and consider all aspects of a person’s life including education, housing, employment and how they are all inter-related. It is also essential that spiritual health is covered in this framework, particularly considering the suicide pandemic in remote Aboriginal communities. The closing the gap statistics that compare Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians across various health indicators are alarming.



There needs to be the creation of strategic partnerships (particularly with the Aboriginal medical services) to improve the development and management of culturally appropriate health services for Aboriginal people. Examples of quality collaborations include Mawarnkarra in Roebourne who provides outreach programs to remote communities; and health focused education and community events and the Purple Truck in the NT featuring two self-contained dialysis units to service remote areas. (House, 2020)

Other recommendations and issues raised by stakeholders include:

- Health promotion does not regularly see items translated into Indigenous languages.
- Why do members of the public need to pay for parking at hospitals?
- Why are nursing posts not established in remote communities?
- Roll out a housing and health infrastructure needs survey to remote WA communities.
- There are extremely high rates of chronic diseases such as renal failure, cardio-vascular diseases, and diabetes. This proves there needs to be investment in more dialysis units and training. As preventable diseases, this recommendation is also linked to the need for health living programs.
- Telehealth was well received by stakeholders. The issue though was the access to technology and the ability of community to use it.
- Use rural schools for children's specialist and allied telehealth.
- Understand the need for men's only and women's only spaces.

It can be argued that the inequality in health status endured by Aboriginal people is linked to systemic discrimination. This occurs through the inaccessibility of mainstream services and lower access to health services, including primary health care, and inadequate provision of health infrastructure. The Royal Australasian College of Physicians describes these health inequities as 'both avoidable and systematic'.

A lack of locally available health care infrastructure – including technology to support telehealth and e health services – can be a disincentive to individuals who might otherwise consider relocating to the community; existing residents may consider moving to urban centres, particularly in instances where advanced age or chronic illness is involved. Nursing posts, mobile health units and telehealth are all options to support health needs. Mobile Health Unites are agile and can utilise satellite connectivity, where internet and telehealth may not be available. The creation of community access hubs, with the relevant technology and field officers, would enable greater access to support (as a blended solution to the trucks). Murdoch University did complete extensive research to develop a mobile health and education clinic for remote communities. (University, 2017) Limited funding prevented the trial from being executed,

“We know that people in these remote areas have difficulty in accessing health care because of the time, energy and costs involved in travelling to major towns. This can have impacts on their general health,”

“By bringing health care and other services to them, we will be helping to deal with potential issues before they reach a point of crisis.” Professor Bruce Walker.



A summary of recommendations include:

1. Telehealth through technology access with community-based hubs and locally trained health workers.
2. Native language materials
3. Community healthy lifestyle programs
4. Purple truck is a program that operates in the Northern Territory that could be a mobile health services that merges telehealth.

Education and Training

Infrastructure is thought to increase economic activation within communities where job creation leads to training and ongoing opportunities within the regions and, potentially, remote communities. It is recognised, however, that Aboriginal people need to have effective governance and capability to participate in economic activation. This means self-determination, Aboriginal lead programs and projects, acceptance of cultural protocols and a collective focus on outcome. The Bunbury Outer Ring Road, for example, saw the creation of an Aboriginal business consortium that effectively discuss and guide dialogue, on matters of the project that could lead to education, employment and procurement opportunities, in the South West.

“Our message has been clear: while the sector is relatively young, there is enormous entrepreneurial passion and drive among local Aboriginal people to build thriving businesses, now and into the future. The clear feedback is that with opportunity comes prosperity and the local Aboriginal business sector is standing ready to help deliver this essential infrastructure with pride and confidence.” Joanne Hill, Southwest Connex Aboriginal Participation Coordinator

To enable participation in economic activity several steps could be undertaken to effectively increase Aboriginal participation.

- Inclusion programs to map the Aboriginal community’s potential economic growth and community needs. These programs will need to be tailored to geographical areas to ensure they are fit for purpose.
- Cultural Awareness Programs to educate non-Aboriginal community on the value of Aboriginal Culture and their contribution to the success of Australian society.
- Employment targets to increase Aboriginal participation in the workforce.
- Contractor engagement targets and accountability and auditing to ensure compliance.
- Bridge the gap to employment programs aligned against the skill shortages for youth and unemployed.
- Key education and Aboriginal awareness programs with industry and major infrastructure projects to develop a deeper respect and understanding of Aboriginal Culture.
- Maximising the not-for-profit sector to fund tailored programs.
- Literacy programs for students



In general, there was strong support for infrastructure that benefits most people, especially students at the new city university campus, and families in general:

“I heard about the new city campus not having classes. What is the point in that? If you are going to promote a university in the city but have no teaching mechanisms, it’s a poor approach. Why would you put the executive in the city, and separate corporate governance from education and research? What I thought it was going to be, was connecting students better with business, not careerists in the governance sector. If it’s millions of dollars and it’s not for students, I question the commercial objectives. It would be good to see the digital tower [in Yagan Square] displaying Aboriginal student artwork, theatre, architectural work, et cetera.” Aboriginal stakeholder

Participants would like the State to oversee the development of ECU’s city campus, as well as the cultural centre as they feel they are not involved in an open process of consultation and are unaware of who is making decisions. In relation to the new city campus, one point stood out:

“Why are we and the community not included? Or consulted with effectively? As far as I know, there was no cultural leadership from [REDACTED] or effective consultation. It all seems exclusive. It should connect to the new museum, Yagan Square and the wetlands. My understanding is overwhelmingly negative. I don’t know why, as a Noongar person, I don’t get to know what’s going on.” Aboriginal stakeholder

There was strong support for regional campuses also, so that students did not have to leave home to further their educational aspirations. An absence of educational facilities in a community can dissuade families from either staying in community or relocating to the area. It can also cause families and friendships to split apart as people leave their community to pursue learning and educational opportunities elsewhere.

One stakeholder spoke about the need for schools to be built in a way that embraces cultural learning outside of the classroom. Others spoke about the sadness in losing school of the air for remote learning. It is essential that children are engaged in high quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education in their early years. Gumala Aboriginal Corporation have an initiative titled 3A Early Learning, *“That uses learning strategies which incorporate educational games, conversational reading and enriched care giving, in culturally safe environments to 0–4-year-olds”* (Gumala, 2021) . Benefits of the program include higher school attendance and smoother transitions, healthy behavioural and lifestyle patterns and healthy parent-child interactions.

Other concerns raised against education and training include:

- A lack of (specialist) staffing, and staffing in general, and limited VET courses accessible to remote students.
- Remote education forums will require ongoing capacity-building, resources and funding.
- The need for regional boarding schools so remote communities do not need to send their children to the city.
- Lack of resources such as libraries and information technology
- Residents may require a range of skills and knowledge to maintain community infrastructure



and build on economic opportunities.

The human right to education is characterised by four features. Education must be available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable. (*Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment No. 13 – the Right to Education, UN Doc E/C.12/1999/10 (1999), paragraph 6–7.*)

Aboriginal Enterprise opportunities was also highlighted, including cultural tourism and regenerative agriculture. Camping with Custodians, in WA, currently has 5 sites including Peedamulla Station in the Pilbara. Camping with Custodians is an Australian first initiative which allows visitors to stay on Aboriginal lands and engage with Aboriginal people. For communities, Camping with Custodians creates income, employment, training and the opportunity to showcase local culture. (Peedamulla, 2020) This is a great example of self-determination, empowerment, employment and training through infrastructure development and enterprises. Similar initiatives have been trialled at national parks like Karijini, which needs urgent upgrades to facilities with TripAdvisor noting reviews of poor unsealed road conditions.

Law and Justice

The SIS aims to identify opportunities in the law and justice sector. Limited information was provided by respondents on the issue, except for the statement below.

How can we as a people trust in a system where we make up the majority of the prison population, the intergenerational trauma that triggers poor behaviors is not addressed, our suicide rates are through the roof and we die younger than non-Aboriginal people? Meanwhile our mob in Roebourne prison are treated like animals, contained in cement cells that reach temperatures more than 45 degrees. Aboriginal stakeholder

Another anecdotal concern is the lack of law and order in remote communities. Police need to be present and supported, resourced, and adequately staffed. They need to enforce law and order, eliminate alcohol (in dry communities) and work to educate community with relevant information.

The Police and Aboriginal Communities have the potential to benefit from building programs in partnership that include youth program that target at risk youth. The WA imprisonment rate is higher than any other State or territory with 4.1% of its Aboriginal population behind bars, compared to 2.9% in the Northern Territory and a national rate of 2.6%. These facts contribute to the lack of trust between Police and Aboriginal communities. Through community empowerment and real commitment by Police in appropriately enforcing law and order WA could see significant benefit to community outcomes for Aboriginal communities. An example in NSW is the PCYC Rise Up Program.

Initiatives that have found success include Warakurna community, *“The first entirely Indigenous-run police station in Western Australia is using cultural ties to gain the trust of a remote Aboriginal community.”* (Joyner, 2018) and Barndimalgu Court in Geraldton. *Barndimalgu is a specialised Family Violence Court in Geraldton and is the only therapeutic court in Australia where the Aboriginal Community members assist the Magistrate during the sentencing process.* (Barndimalgu Court update, 2018)

Issues were raised by stakeholders, with the way police responded to Aboriginal communities from a Western mindset, which privileges a nuclear family model. An interviewee spoke of an Aboriginal society based on a kinship model of far more extended family connections. This concept of a kinship society is not well understood by police, leading to different perceptions of family and different understandings of family violence.



It was acknowledged that there are entrenched issues of family violence within many communities that makes intervention and rehabilitation difficult. The effects of intergenerational trauma mean that there is in many cases a normalisation of family violence, and a tendency on the part of perpetrators to minimise or rationalise the harm caused by their actions. The creation of Healing Centres/programs, in community could assist the rehabilitation, reintegration and possible diversion of law and justice concerns. They are community controlled and operated, and support healing to the specific needs of community through traditional and western practices. (Foundation, 2020)

7 CONCLUSION

Infrastructure underpins the wellbeing of our society, the prosperity of our economy, and the health of our environment. The Strategy will address a broad range of infrastructure sectors (and cross-sectoral issues), with a primary focus on infrastructure that is fully or partly funded by the State Government. The Strategy will also consider types of infrastructure that provide an important service to the community, whether they are owned by another level of government or the private sector (for example gas pipelines, airports, and telecommunications). The Strategy will focus on both infrastructure projects and programs as well as non-build solutions such as policy, regulatory, pricing, technology, procurement, skills, and governance reforms.

Access to quality human and social services is critical to societal wellbeing and supports social and economic development. Demand is ever-increasing and the way these services, which represent a significant and increasing proportion of State Government expenditure, are delivered is evolving. State Government expenditure on health has more than doubled in the last 10 years, and expenditure is projected to approach 38 per cent of the entire State Budget by 2026-27. Addressing social issues such as homelessness and mental health is complex and requires integrated and cross-sectoral solutions. While disadvantage is complex and involves many factors, as part of a package of integrated initiatives, infrastructure can play a role in addressing this. For example, infrastructure may support the provision of better education services, and access to those services. For example, shared school and community facilities, and equipment and technology may be co-located for more effective learning.

Infrastructure challenges in remote Aboriginal communities is exacerbated by several environmental factors including geographical isolation, challenging terrain, and high costs. Due to what many people would say is inadequate investment and maintenance of existing infrastructure, WA now need to act and advance the rights of Aboriginal people to self-determination and empowerment, but more importantly access to clean drinking water and initiatives that will bring about equity in comparison with non-Indigenous people. Skills shortages could see local employment opportunities and community operated solar plants for energy and health needs. Sufficient and appropriate infrastructure is a prerequisite to sustainable economic development. The aim is to bring essential services up to par with those in mainstream Australian towns, a process referred to in government circles as 'normalising' Aboriginal communities.

IWA should look beyond infrastructure development needs in Aboriginal communities and aspire to embed Supplier Diversity to promote the purchase of goods and services from marginalised Aboriginal businesses and start a conversation about cultural change that can have significant social impact.

Supply Nation's 'The Sleeping Giant' report (2018) highlighted the social return on investment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Key findings of the report found that for every dollar of revenue raised, Certified Suppliers create \$4.41 of economic and social value within their community. This was found to be even higher in small Indigenous businesses. Indigenous businesses were also found to employ more than 30 times the proportion of Indigenous people than other people, provide training to their staff and owners, employees and communities were found to be very proud of Indigenous businesses. Business owners were found to reinvest revenue directly into their community and provide generational security for their family.



8 DOCUMENTS AND DATA

1. A Stronger Tomorrow: State Infrastructure Strategy Discussion Paper (June 2020)
2. A Stronger Tomorrow: State Infrastructure Strategy Discussion Paper (Consultation Outcomes Report) (December 2020)
3. A Look at the Regions, A Complementary Resource to: A Stronger Tomorrow, State Infrastructure Strategy Discussion Paper (June 2020)
4. A Look at the Sectors, A Complementary Resource to: A Stronger Tomorrow, State Infrastructure Strategy Discussion Paper (June 2020)
5. [Confidential Draft] Challenges and Opportunities (CHOPS) (January 2021)
6. State Infrastructure Strategy Scenario Planning: Infrastructure WA (January 2021)



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9 APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Upon completion of stakeholder engagement for SIS feedback, IWA requested additional information against specific themes of the strategy. This information below is collated as an appendix to the report for contextual purposes.

1.1 Aboriginal Procurement Policy

Query: *Is there any reference to APP improvements or further opportunities?*

IPS Response:

Some of the major issues we have identified with the APP in WA (specifically) are:

- There is a lack of awareness that the policy exists (the communication is not flowing down to procurement departments);
- There is a lack of understanding in how to utilise the policy;
- There is unconscious bias in that utilising the policy will bring a less than acceptable quality of product/service; and
- There is no acknowledgment that the cost of running Indigenous businesses, and therefore choosing a non Indigenous business over price (need to consider assessment weightings)

The APP needs to be mandated and enforced from the top down. Indigenous businesses need to stop being awarded only lower value contracts, and be empowered to be awarded higher-value contracts in order to grow, to become more sustainable and obviously to employ people within the business

Supply Nation itself has not reported from a WA perspective. But there are some great references below that may assist:

[Media statements - Successful Aboriginal Procurement Policy to be extended](#)

[Research Reports - Supply Nation](#)

Regarding the government policy settings, the introduction of mandatory unconscious-bias training would be a great place to start so that we could help alleviate some of that risk aversion to wanting to do business with Indigenous businesses. There should be some strengthening around the mandatory set-aside. Why have a mandatory set-aside if it is not doing what it's intended to do—its purpose?

Only four per cent of contracts were awarded to Indigenous businesses in the value range of \$80,000 to \$200,000 in the mandatory set-aside area. 64 per cent of contracts that were awarded to Indigenous businesses were \$10,000 or less. We need to see the mandatory set-aside actually having a target on it to increase from four per cent. Again, if we are thinking about the impacts we want to have through Indigenous business in economic development—to see more people in business, to see the growth of businesses, to see sustainable and great capable businesses—we need to see higher-value contracts. That is where tougher rigour around the mandatory set-aside comes in.



1.2 Health Sector

Query: *Are you familiar with primary care hubs in WA and whether they will work for remote communities?*

IPS Response:

There are some good health support mechanisms in regional areas but not remote, however they are not culturally appropriate and underfunded. The state should try and work collaboratively with the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Sector (Aboriginal Medical Services) who offer holistic health care, outreach programs to remote communities and a culturally safe and sensitive environment. Mawarrnkarra and BRAHMS in Broome are 2 great examples. Unlike other health initiatives, AMS also deliver medication to patients (can mitigate the risk of patient family members collecting medication and on-selling) and provide home visits and field officers for those patients with either transport or access issues. Telehealth is a great concept, but with it comes issues of access, user ability, maintenance and for on the ground support for dressing changes etc.

The SW Hub sounds exciting and provides a multipurpose centre, NSW have already rolled this out quite successfully [Multipurpose Service Program \(nsw.gov.au\)](https://www.nsw.gov.au/multipurpose-service-program)

Aboriginal Health hubs need support to access more health services and programs in the one place instead of being referred to various services providers with different levels of cultural education, safety, or responsiveness (and possibly not in the region). Holistic health care means providing all services through the one place. SWAMS in Bunbury are doing amazing things in the Aboriginal community, however some would say have outgrown their premises, particularly now that they incorporate social and emotional wellbeing activities and health. Many of the AMS clinics are aged and need upgrading, which is a growth limitation. Communities are well equipped to identify and drive solutions however they need to be adequately resourced and supported.

On telehealth – there is an interesting statistic in 2018, telehealth saved WA patients from travelling 28.6 million kilometres? [Telehealth \(healthywa.wa.gov.au\)](https://www.healthywa.wa.gov.au/telehealth) There are great cultural resources to share the importance of telehealth [WACHS: Mary G telehealth](#) but again it comes back to whether the right infrastructure is in community, is it maintained, is relevant training rolled out, is someone employed to monitor the system, is transport available to collect patients and bring them to the telehealth site and is English the appropriate language or is a translator required? Communities would encourage the use of telehealth as it enables consistent and coordinated follow up against their health needs, in a way that means they do not need to leave the safety and cultural security of their town/community.

It also means mitigating the challenge of recruiting professionals to live permanently in rural and remote locations.



Pros and Cons of Remote Hubs

Pros	Con
Culturally appropriate making Aboriginal people more likely to engage in the health hub which is a great outcome	Remote areas are at the greatest need of assistance and depending on where they are located the tyranny of distance, or access, may be an issue
Will provide employment opportunities	Creating a health hub may result in competitive funding for the mobile buses that can access more remote communities as not within budget
Enables a safe place for Aboriginal people to engage	Will it limit the exposure of Aboriginal culture to non-Aboriginal people which would value and benefit from the experience
One stop shop for Aboriginal people to connect and engage	Costly without the realistic capacity to service the most remote and at-risk members of the Aboriginal community
It could be part of a blended solution where the mobile health vans could be their headquarters to ensure transition of knowledge and learning	
Fit for purpose solution tailored to communities in the catchment area sensitive to the health care	
If located correctly could potentially service a large proportion of the community	
Having hubs would mean shorter stays in hospital	
Can be co-designed and patient centric. Speak to community about their specific needs and wants for the space	

