



**Hon Dr Tony Buti MLA
Minister for Education; Aboriginal Affairs;
Citizenship and Multicultural Interests**

Our Ref: 80-07117

Hon Peter Foster MLC
Chair
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs

Via email: env@parliament.wa.gov.au

Dear Chairman

PETITION 072 – STOLEN GENERATIONS COMPENSATION

Thank you for your letter of 20 December 2022, seeking comments on the terms of the above petition on Stolen Generations compensation (the petition), and the petitioners' preliminary submissions to the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs (the Committee).

I thank the petitioners—Bringing Them Home WA, Yokai Healing, and Kimberley Stolen Generation Aboriginal Corporation—and the petition's sponsor, Hon Dr Brad Pettitt MLC, for bringing this significant issue to Parliament's attention. I also thank all Western Australians who took the time to sign the petition and voice their support. I would be pleased to offer any assistance the Committee requires in connection with this matter.

The Department of the Premier and Cabinet (Department) has been monitoring the progress of other jurisdictions' redress schemes for the Stolen Generations. This includes schemes presently operated by Victoria, New South Wales, and the Commonwealth (the Territories Stolen Generations Redress Scheme), and completed schemes in Tasmania and South Australia. The Committee's consideration of the petition will complement the Department's work, and any recommendations arising from that process would help deliver better outcomes for Western Australian Stolen Generations survivors and their kin.

As Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, I welcome the opportunity to continue my engagement with the Stolen Generations members, their families and representatives, towards identifying the best ways forward in addressing their ongoing needs, which will also include consideration of other jurisdictions' experiences. It is acknowledged that no amount of money will ever be able to make up for the pain and suffering endured by members of the Stolen Generations. However, we can commit ourselves to truth-telling and support the healing process.

As noted in the petitioners' submissions, 2022 marked the 25th anniversary of the release of *Bringing Them Home: the Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families* (Bringing them Home Report). That report's 54 recommendations elicited a wide range of approaches to addressing the experiences of the Stolen Generations. Some of those recommendations, including those pertaining to improved outcomes in language, culture, mental health, self-determination and youth justice, are reflected in key components of the WA Government's Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy, and the State's Implementation Plan for the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, both released in September 2021.

Since their release, work has focussed on embedding the Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy into the State public sector and rolling out its implementation plan for the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. In striving to deliver on those commitments, we have been working in partnership with Aboriginal stakeholders, including the Aboriginal Advisory Council of WA and the Aboriginal Health Council of WA, towards delivering better whole-of-lifespan outcomes for Aboriginal Western Australians. These outcomes focus on cultural, social, emotional and economic wellbeing, with a concurrent emphasis on healing, truth-telling, and empowerment. Considering the needs of members of the Stolen Generations and their descendants is integral to this work.

The 2022-2023 State Budget dedicated more than \$600 million towards Closing the Gap initiatives, including \$374 million towards Aboriginal wellbeing for the 2022-2023 financial year. This includes:

- A \$17.6 million investment in an Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing pilot;
- \$6.3 million on developing a new Aboriginal Short Stay Accommodation facility in Perth CBD;
- A \$9.2 million expansion of the Strong Spirit Strong Mind project;
- \$12.6 million towards a new Child, Adolescent Forensic mental health and AOD outreach service targeted at young people (aged 10-24).

Terms of the petition

With regard to the terms of the petition, I note that many of those recommendations were predicated on a Commonwealth-coordinated national approach, which failed to materialise under successive Federal governments, leaving individual jurisdictions to pursue their own pathways. Other recommendations have been incorporated into the work of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (and earlier iterations of that process) and are now integral to the Indigenous affairs agenda of every Australian jurisdiction.

Broadly speaking, the Healing Foundation has consolidated the Bringing Them Home Report's 54 recommendations into four clear actions, in its 2021 report, *Make Healing Happen*:

1. Redress for the Stolen Generations and their descendants;
2. Meeting the complex needs of Stolen Generations survivors;
3. Healing intergenerational trauma and preventing new harm; and
4. Sustainable and robust monitoring and accountability.

Partnership with WA Stolen Generations

The Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy places Aboriginal culture at the heart of everything we do as a government that affects the lives and wellbeing of Aboriginal Western Australians. This includes reshaping services and systems to work with culture, supporting Aboriginal-led solutions, and engaging in partnerships and shared decision-making with Aboriginal people. This complements Priority Reforms One and Three of the National Agreement, which call for formal partnerships and shared decision-making, and transforming government organisations to ensure they are culturally safe and responsive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's needs.

In this context, I concur with Hon Dr Pettitt's submission, to consider the role and leadership of Aboriginal Western Australians in addressing this issue. It is essential that any approach positions Aboriginal people as active participants and partners in determining the needs of Stolen Generations survivors and how those needs can be addressed. In doing so, it would serve greatly in the interests of the process to consider the cultural safety of its participants and optimise cross-cultural communication, whilst minimising the prospects of re-traumatising people who have experienced such acute sorrow and loss. This could be achieved by seeking the participation and collaboration of those with experience in support and advocacy for the Stolen Generations.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to provide initial comments on the petition, and I look forward to assisting the Committee further in this matter.

Yours sincerely



Dr Tony Buti MLA
MINISTER FOR ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

20 JAN 2023