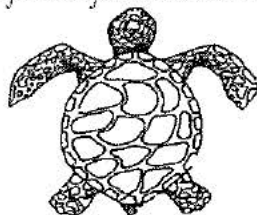


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PO BOX 920  
BROOME, WA, 6725

Committee Secretary  
Department of the Senate  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

2 September 2019

Dear Committee

**Djarindjin Aboriginal Corporation response to the Senate Select Committee on the effectiveness of the Australian Government's Northern Australia agenda**

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Committee's inquiry into the Australian Government's efforts to support the accelerated development of Australia's north.

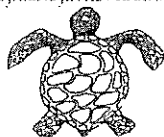
The Djarindjin Aboriginal Corporation (DAC) represents the community of Djarindjin, a community of 300 Bardi and Jawi people near to the tip of the Dampier Peninsula, some 200km north of Broome in the far north of Western Australia.

DAC was incorporated over 30 years ago to manage the business of our people. Our mission is to create a sustainable future for our community, one that allows us to take care of our country and thrive as a community. We want to be financially sustainable, have a clear plan for our future that will enable our next generations to be empowered with self-determination.

DAC has the benefit of owning an airport that provides hot refuelling services to helicopter operators flying for the oil and gas companies operating in the Browse Basin. The skilled staff who operate the airport are all members of the Peninsula community. This has allowed our community to become 70 per cent self-funded and offset the decline in government funding of services to our people. We have a range of other small local businesses as well, but it is the airport that provides the bulk of our revenue. The steady development of other local businesses represents the key to an economically diversified future for our community.

The current airport is situated on a Special Purpose Lease (an old pastoral lease) that allows us to run the business with some certainty of tenure. We are examining the development of a new airport situated in the same lease which can offer more extensive services and amenities to the offshore oil and gas companies. We have commissioned economic, social and environmental impact assessment studies and are discussing our proposal with state and federal government and potential users.

Our community townsite, however, is on Aboriginal Lands Trust land and is ungazetted. This means we have no autonomy or certainty about our housing and all of the services that support a



community, such as waste management, water management, sewerage, road quality and lighting. It is complex for us to plan to grow our businesses and continue to build a socially and educationally thriving community when we lack secure access to basic services or the autonomy to develop those services.

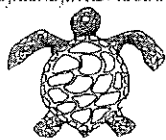
It is from this perspective that we address the Committee's Terms of Reference below.

### **Funding the development of infrastructure and capturing the full value of existing and emerging industries**

- We welcome the creation of the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility (NAIF) and the opportunity that provides us to access debt in order to fund our infrastructure development, to support the community and the resources to be self-sustaining, as the redevelopment of the airport. The NAIF team have been supportive of our goals and provided useful advice along the way. The administration of the Australian Government loan through a State Government department has, however, increased the level of complexity for us and delayed our timeline while we focus on getting State Government support for our project.
- NAIF, while very beneficial in many ways, does not include a grant component. For communities such as ours which does not have access to equity capital easily, this can make realising our economic development goals more difficult, in particular for the proposed airport redevelopment and its infrastructure within the community. We are owned by our community and we are trying to lift our whole community out of poverty and economic disadvantage. Given this, there is limited appetite to give away any ownership stake in our most significant business asset, and potentially lose the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to shift the economic outcome for the whole community.
- Our ability to benefit fully from the once-in-a-lifetime economic development opportunity that the growth of the Browse Basin activities represents, is hampered by securing the financial support to develop, but also by the administrative requirements of three levels of government. We need to invest significant time and energy in engaging with all three levels of government to get approvals for projects and ensure land tenure is sufficient for a long term project. Given our remote location, this engagement becomes even more time-consuming and expensive.

### **Economic and social benefit arising from that investment for Northern Australians, in particular First Nations people.**

- If we are to take advantage of these and a number of other economic development opportunities, we need to be able to accommodate our people moving back to country from places outside the Dampier Peninsular with housing and access to services that people in large centres enjoy. We are happy to manage these ourselves, but we need innovative



approaches from Governments to allow that to happen: in land tenure reform in Western Australia, funding options for community infrastructure from the Australian Government, and support for the Shire of Broome to encourage it to administer the local requirements without being economically disadvantageous to the Shire or DAC.

- We also need to drive economic development activities for ourselves and be supported by governments working 'with' us, rather than having things done 'to' and 'for' us. We appreciate the interest and support in helping us to make most of our current opportunities but we need to have more effective control of the speed and approach of our development, rather than having these dictated by bureaucrats, many located thousands of kilometres away from us. It is through our own stewardship of developing our future, that we can develop the most sustainable and successful model. That said, pragmatic practical skill sets to help us do that are most welcome, particularly those that are designed to build capacity within our community.
- There also needs to be a recognition that community leaders may be found other places than just the Prescribed Body Corporates (PBCs) and land councils who represent diverse groups of native title traditional owners and language groups. We would encourage the Australian Government and its departments to ensure that it looks beyond the PBCs and land councils for community leaders and indigenous groups who are already involved in economic development opportunities. Often the business acumen for economic development may be found in local Aboriginal corporations and these people may be key partners for the successful implementation of government policy.

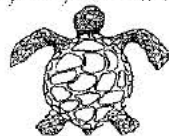
#### **Measures taken to develop an appropriately skilled workforce.**

- Our experience shows us that functional literacy and numeracy needs to be addressed in many Aboriginal communities and approached in a way that is culturally coherent. DAC is working with Murdoch University to develop a multi-literacy and numeracy program targeted at post-school aged adults who may have slipped through the cracks in the educational system. Our goal is to help these adults in our community be job ready, as we increase the employment opportunities on the Peninsula. Our hope is that this type of 'stop-gap' education will only be required for a short period and our young people will be inspired by the adults in their family to stay on at school and achieve higher levels of literacy and numeracy.

#### **Any related matters**

- It is important to understand that for any of the projects the Australian Government supports, there needs to be a broader view of the interrelated activities that need to take place to make the project successful. For example, the State Government's sealing of the remaining 90km of road between Beagle Bay and Broome changes the cost and capability of goods and services travelling on the Dampier Peninsula and is crucial for improving the cost

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effectiveness of fuel delivery to the airport. Concurrently, an upgrade of reliable telecommunication services for data transfer will be crucial for the people of the Peninsula. As more Bardi and Jawi people move back to country to take advantage of the job opportunities and the chance to live sustainably on country, there has to be a thoughtful development of the community itself with housing, lighting, roads, waste and water at the forefront.

Northern Australia cannot be developed in a piecemeal way, we all must rise together with equitable access to services and opportunity.

**Brian Lee**

**Chair, Djarindjin Aboriginal Corporation**