REVIEW OF THE NATIONAL AGREEMENT ON CLOSING THE GAP

Submission to the Productivity Commission

Strengthening Closing the Gap through Aboriginal leadership, place-based reform, and shared decision-making

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VISION

Aboriginal people and communities have the power, capability and resources to determine their own priorities and shape the decisions that affect their lives. Aboriginal leadership and community priorities drive coordinated government action and sustained progress towards Closing the Gap.

Executive Summary

Binarri-binyja yarrawoo (**BBY**) recognises the progress made through stronger Aboriginal leadership, formal shared decision-making and the *East Kimberley Place-Based Partnership, 'Little Footprints, Big Futures'*.

The East Kimberley provides an important test of Closing the Gap implementation. Strong Aboriginal governance is in place and the *'Little Footprints, Big Futures' Place-Based Partnership* provides a formal mechanism connecting Aboriginal community representatives and organisations with Commonwealth, Western Australian and local government around community-determined Early Years priorities.

EVIDENCE FROM BBY'S GOVERNANCE AND ENGAGEMENT

Across BBY's governance, engagement and partnership processes, recurring themes include stronger community influence in decision-making, coordinated action around local priorities, long-term approaches, and clearer accountability for what happens next.

CORE IMPLEMENTATION GAP

Further shared effort is needed so community priorities routinely travel from Aboriginal governance through shared decision-making to investment, implementation, outcomes and reporting back to communities.

OPPORTUNITIES TO STRENGTHEN IMPLEMENTATION

- ⚠ **Sustain** the infrastructure that enables place-based reform.
- ⚠ **Share** power and strengthen community influence.
- ⚠ **Strengthen** ACCO capability to lead reform.
- ⚠ **Create** accountability and make progress visible to community.

1. About BBY and the communities we serve

BBY's role

Backbone ACCO supporting Aboriginal-led reform in the East Kimberley.

Binarri-binyja yarrawoo (**BBY**) is the backbone organisation for Empowered Communities East Kimberley. BBY works alongside Aboriginal communities, member organisations, government and other partners to support community-led reform, shared decision-making and place-based solutions to complex social and economic challenges.

Guided by Empowered Communities' national model for community-led reform.

BBY's work is guided by the principles of Empowered Communities, which seek to shift decision-making closer to communities and support genuine Aboriginal leadership in policy and program design.

BBY's Policy Position

Place-based, community-led policy, advocacy, and systems change.

BBY supports policy, funding and service system reform that is community-led, evidence-informed and responsive to local context. We advocate for approaches that strengthen Aboriginal leadership, self-determination, coordination across government, and align investment with priorities identified through East Kimberley community-led governance and engagement.

BBY's policy and advocacy work is informed by local priorities and evidence gathered through Local Management Committees, Working Groups, community representatives, ACCOs, engagement with families and Elders, and work with service providers and government partners across the East Kimberley.

Recurring themes across these processes include:

- Decisions being informed by local knowledge and experience.
- Building on existing community strengths and services.
- Better coordination between governments and service providers.
- Greater local involvement in decisions affecting communities.
- Long-term approaches rather than short-term responses.

East Kimberley Context

Grounded in the strengths and realities of East Kimberley communities.

The East Kimberley is a vast and culturally diverse region with strong Aboriginal leadership, community strengths and a capable Aboriginal community-controlled sector. Remoteness, workforce constraints, high service delivery costs and fragmented investment can limit equitable access to services and opportunities. Effective reform requires place-based approaches that build on local strengths and priorities and reflect the realities of remote communities.

‘Little Footprints, Big Futures’ East Kimberley Place-Based Partnership

Connecting community and government in shared decision-making.

The East Kimberley *‘Little Footprints, Big Futures’ Place-Based Partnership*, provides a mechanism for Aboriginal communities and all three levels of government to work together through shared decision-making, collective action and mutual accountability. Established under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, the Partnership creates opportunities to align policy, funding and service delivery with community-identified priorities and evidence. BBY encourages policy and investment approaches that strengthen existing community governance structures, build on established local partnerships and support coordinated action across the region.

2. Strong foundations for progress

The region has demonstrated that the structures required for Closing the Gap reform can be established. Shared decision-making arrangements are in place, Aboriginal leadership is strong, and the East Kimberley *‘Little Footprints, Big Futures’ Place-Based Partnership* has created a practical mechanism for community and government to work together around shared priorities. These foundations provide a strong platform for the next phase of progress.

Strength 1

Strong Aboriginal-led governance provides the foundation.

Aboriginal-led governance structures enable local priorities to be identified, strengthened and brought into regional decision-making processes.

Strength 2

The mechanism for shared decision-making is established.

The East Kimberley *‘Little Footprints, Big Futures’ Place-Based Partnership* has created an agreed mechanism for aligning community priorities, government decision-makers and shared action.

Strength 3

The Place-Based Partnership provides a platform for coordinated action.

The Partnership provides a platform for Aboriginal representatives, organisations and governments to coordinate effort around shared priorities.

Strength 4

Local priorities provide clear direction for reform.

Local priorities provide a clear direction for reform. The opportunity is to strengthen how those priorities translate into coordinated action and long-term outcomes.

3. Turning strong foundations into outcomes

Building on these strong foundations requires sustained community influence, capability, resourcing, and accountability to translate shared priorities into outcomes.

Opportunity 1

Place-based reform requires sustained infrastructure.

The East Kimberley *'Little Footprints, Big Futures' Place-Based Partnership* and backbone function provide important infrastructure for coordinating community governance, working groups, government agencies, evidence, proposals and implementation. Sustaining this capability over time supports continuity and enables shared priorities to progress into coordinated action.

Opportunity 2

Shared decision-making should strengthen community influence.

Further shared effort is needed so community priorities routinely travel from Aboriginal governance through shared decision-making to investment, implementation, outcomes and reporting back to communities.

Opportunity 3

Strong ACCOs strengthen the infrastructure for reform.

A strong community-controlled sector requires capability beyond service delivery. Governance, leadership, workforce, organisational development, policy, evidence and partnership capability strengthen the ability of ACCOs to participate in and lead reform.

Opportunity 4

Progress should be visible and accountable to community.

Clear accountability helps communities and governments see how agreed priorities move through decision-making, investment and implementation, and what outcomes are achieved. Progress, responsibilities and next steps should be visible and reported back to community.

4. Strengthening implementation

Based on this evidence, BBY identifies four opportunities to strengthen implementation of the National Agreement in the East Kimberley.

1. Sustain the infrastructure that enables place-based reform

The East Kimberley *'Little Footprints, Big Futures' Place-Based Partnership* provides a strong foundation for coordinated, place-based reform. Building on existing investment in the Partnership and backbone function, sustained and flexible support can provide the continuity, coordination and capability needed to carry community priorities through to implementation.

2. Share power and strengthen community influence

Shared decision-making is most meaningful when Aboriginal people and communities can influence the decisions that affect them. Further commitment and shared effort are needed so community priorities routinely travel from Aboriginal governance through shared decision-making into coordinated government decisions, investment, implementation and outcomes.

3. Strengthen ACCO capability to lead reform

A strong community-controlled sector requires capability beyond service delivery. Investment in governance, leadership, workforce, organisational development, policy, evidence and partnership capability enables ACCOs to participate in and lead reform, consistent with the intent of Priority Reform 2.

4. Make progress visible and accountable to community

Communities and governments should be able to see what happens to agreed priorities. Priorities should be traceable through shared decisions, government responses, investment and implementation to outcomes, with progress clearly reported back to community.



Conclusion

The East Kimberley has strong foundations for Closing the Gap reform. Aboriginal-led governance is established and the *'Little Footprints, Big Futures' Place-Based Partnership* provides a mechanism for communities and governments to work together around shared priorities.

The opportunity now is to build on these foundations: sustain the infrastructure that enables place-based reform, share power, and strengthen community influence, strengthen ACCO capability to lead reform, and make progress visible and accountable to community.

Success will be seen when community priorities routinely travel from Aboriginal governance through shared decision-making into coordinated government decisions, investment, implementation, and outcomes, with progress clearly reported back to community.