



# Aboriginal Tourism and Business Development

A Clean State & WAITOC Stimulus and Recovery Proposal

2020

Supporting Aboriginal Tourism	Jobs
An iconic First Nations Cultural Centre in Perth	50-500
5 new Cultural Centres in five regions	50-500
Expand Camping with Custodians program	20
Increase funding to WAITOC	10*
Restore funding to WA Aboriginal Tourism Academy	60-240
Visitor Centre Welcome to Country murals	20
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>210-1240</b>

"Aboriginal tourism is a unique growth industry in Western Australia. As the world's oldest living culture, Aboriginal culture offers tourism experiences unique to Australia not available anywhere else in the world. A strong, diverse and self-supporting Aboriginal business sector is key to empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and placing Aboriginal business owners, their families, and communities in the driver's seat of their economic future."

Robert Taylor, CEO | WAITOC  
WA Indigenous Tourism Operators Council

Aboriginal tourism employs well over 400 people with full-time jobs and contribute roughly \$44 million in gross state product. The Aboriginal business sector is growing rapidly and faster than the rest of the economy<sup>19</sup>.

Survey results show that 80% of visitors to WA are interested in Aboriginal tourism experiences, but just 20% take part in such activities<sup>6</sup>. There is also an appetite amongst residents to learn more about First Nations culture and participate in day tours.

Clean State strongly supports programs that work together with indigenous entrepreneurs and communities to guarantee products are market-ready and that any disadvantage is accounted for and remediated, whilst ensuring self-determination. The 2019 State Budget allocated just \$3.6 million for Aboriginal tourism initiatives.<sup>1</sup>

# The Proposal

**WAITOC in partnership with Clean State are advocating for the state government to support Aboriginal tourism enterprises through a six-part package that includes:**

**1. A second round of immediate assistance for Indigenous tourism operators.**

**2. An iconic Perth-based Aboriginal Cultural Centre, with WAITOC having a seat at the table during the planning and design of the Centre, and a permanent home inside the Centre once it's established.**

A National Indigenous Cultural Centre was proposed at Elizabeth Quay by the Barnett government in 2011 but was later removed from the planning of the precinct.

Completing this project would show commitment to being a city that acknowledges, respects and celebrates its Indigenous culture, meaningfully increases the visibility of First Nations people, drives attitudinal shift, and creates a major local and international drawcard.

The Committee for Perth, in consultation with over 150 local Indigenous stakeholders has put forward one idea to build a World centre for Indigenous Culture on a central, prime site on the Derbarl Yerrigan / Swan River in Perth, connected to Indigenous communities; research and learning institutions; and arts and cultural institutions, that seeks to combine a curatorial method of presenting Indigenous art, culture and artefacts and a live interactive approach to represent performance, language, food and tradition. It should also enable Indigenous people to self-represent culture and country, provide a place where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders can find spiritual renewal and be a catalyst for reconciliation.<sup>ii</sup>

The Centre would also function as a first point of contact for visitors in WA to connect with Aboriginal culture and provide information on Indigenous tourism experiences throughout the state. Having a central introductory experience will aid in dispersing travel to different regions and will raise awareness of the exciting indigenous product availability in the state. The Cultural Centre would therefore make the ideal location for a permanent home for WAITOC to operate.

We acknowledge \$2m allocated in August to "commence the planning of an Aboriginal Cultural Centre"<sup>iii</sup>. However, It's crucial for WAITOC to be formally included as part of the planning, design and operational phases of the Centre.

**3. Commitment to funding more Aboriginal Cultural Centres (similar to Bilya Koort Boodja in Northam) in each of the five major tourist regions.**

Investment in the planning, design, curation, construction and operation of new, world class Cultural Centres in the regions would celebrate, educate and connect visitors with indigenous culture and history, and also link visitors with cultural tourism opportunities across the state. It would also be a secure source of employment for local artists, historians and guides.

The state government announced \$1.33m towards the Murujuga Living Knowledge Centre and tourism precinct at Conzinc Bay to create a state-of-the-art interpretive centre for the rock art of the Burrup Peninsula - an unparalleled public art gallery of more than a million petroglyphs., and a further \$649,000 to implement the Murujuga Rock Art strategy, which will allow the Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation (MAC) to complete detailed planning and design for the centre.

Clean State proposes funding of at least \$5m for five new Living Knowledge centres, and a further \$2.5m per year to employ 5-10 local First Nations people at each centre.



(photo below)

Traditional Custodians of Murujuga leading a 90- minute rock art and cultural experience at Ngajarli (previously known as Deep Gorge). *Source: murujuga.org.au*



#### 4. Expand the Camping with Custodian projects and support 'Luxury Cultural Camping' enterprises in regions not already covered.

Camping with Custodians is an exciting, Australian-first initiative developed by Tourism WA that involves the development of high-quality campgrounds on Aboriginal lands which are open for travellers to stay on and operated by the community.<sup>iv</sup>

Camping with Custodians provides employment and enterprise opportunities for local communities and a chance to showcase and share traditional customs, art & culture with visitors<sup>24</sup>. Enterprises include guided tours, cultural awareness and immersion projects, art sales, and traditional cooking demonstrations.<sup>v</sup>

There are currently five campgrounds in the Camping with Custodians network, all in the Kimberly and Pilbara regions.

With more resources and support, the Program could be extended to all five tourist regions, including prospective development sites closer to Perth.

The support and development of tourist stays linked to Aboriginal ranger programs with a focus on environmental & cultural education and nature-based adventures<sup>44</sup> and new 'luxury cultural camping' are also strongly recommended.

Clean State welcomes the announcement of \$3.84m for three Camping with Custodians sites at Dampier Peninsula near Broome in August 2020.

**We propose further funding of at least \$15m to develop 6 new camping enterprises over the next three years in areas yet to feature such initiatives from Gascoyne to the Great Southern.**

WAITOC has suggested two possible sites that could be developed almost immediately: At **Roelands**, a shovel-ready site with land tenure and **Merredin**, with a feasibility study for the Njaki Njaki Aboriginal Cultural Tours and campground already developed.

WAITOC have proven competency in managing funding and creating strong outcomes. Clean State believe this funding should be managed by WAITOC.

## Case Study

Once an important rest point for bullock drivers on the Gibb River Road, Imintji Camping with Custodians initiative provides a welcome stop-over for travellers, with newly refurbished campgrounds, a thriving Art Centre. And modern amenities including wifi and even barista-made coffee!

The campground being built provided a turning point for the remote community, turning it into a thriving destination and a reason for locals to stay and work. The Campground provides employment for around 12 local people and the knock-on economic development at the community shop has brought the town back to life. In 2017 the Campground won a national public engagement and community planning award.

## Award winning Imintji Campground and Art Centre, Gibb River Road: A Place to Sit Down'



Imintji Community Store

**5. Increase core funding to the WA Indigenous Tourism Operators Council (WAITOC) to \$2m per year to better support existing and emerging businesses.**

WAITOC is the peak association representing Aboriginal tourism operators throughout WA. Operating for 20 years. It supports and promotes Aboriginal tourism by providing business support, advice and training to Aboriginal tourist operators and businesses.

According to WAITOC, job creation in Indigenous tourism relies heavily on capacity building, mentorship, building trust over time, and developing market-readiness.

The main areas Indigenous business owners have raised consistently as critical for development and growth are:

- Better business support and advice to identify and execute commercial opportunities
- Improved access to finance
- Stronger connections and relationships with industry networks, and
- Better sharing of information and data about commercial opportunities

WAITOC currently employs four staff and receives state government funding of just \$900,000 per year to provide these services (\$3.6m over four years).

Clean State strongly advocates for to increase capacity at WAITOC to grow the capacity of the organisation to support business development for existing, emerging, and market ready Aboriginal tourism enterprises, and develop new products.

**The phenomenal impact WAITOC's support has on Aboriginal tourism businesses speaks for itself.**

From 2015-2019, WAITOC worked with 49 businesses, including 39 new businesses, and created 104 FTE jobs.

This included supporting 25 businesses in the regions (through the *Aboriginal Tourism Development Program*, a once off royalties for regions program) - and in just four years helped these businesses:

- Develop 73 Action Plans
- Increase full time employees by 307%
- Increase tours per week by 192%
- Increase annual customers by 739%
- Increase interstate and intrastate customers by 45%
- Increase international customers by 157%
- Increase annual turnover by 459% and annual profit by 279%; and
- Purchase 44% more goods and services from local providers



## 6. Revitalise tourism business support and development through a new Aboriginal Tourism Academy with funding of \$3m per year.

The Aboriginal Tourism Academy provided support, training, and mentorship for emerging, market ready and export ready businesses, and received \$4.6 million from 2016-2019. Mentors help businesses develop business plans and then provide funding to implement their Action Plans.

This package proposes funding be reinstated for the Academy so that it can support both existing and emerging operators.

The Academy is currently not funded but provides an example of the impact mentoring and business development support can have on Aboriginal enterprises.

**With just four mentors the program created 104 full time equivalent jobs and supported the creation of 39 new tourism businesses throughout WA, over just four years.**

The true potential of this program is yet to be realised, because the limited funding also meant only the Kimberley and South West regions of WA were targeted, leaving a gap in products in other areas, such as the Mid- West, the Pilbara and the Goldfields.

A revitalised program with dedicated funding would allow for a program proportionate to potential and scale of WA's tourism regions. It would allow mentors to work across the entire state to grow product availability and awareness as well as build capacity of operators keen to enter the market.

The previous government only wanted to support emerging and market ready businesses, but there is a strong need for support at all levels.

However, existing operators and businesses have expressed a strong desire for support to professionalise and 'polish' existing businesses, and have proposed a hub at the new Academy could connect operators with help they need, such as business advice, and training and help with administration, tax and financial advice, bookings and marketing.

The Academy could also provide support to export ready businesses (that is, those working with inbound tourism operators and selling their product to an international market). About 20% of businesses are export ready.

According to the WAITOC, funding of \$3m could potentially support 40-50 new businesses every year.

## Case Study

Waringarri Aboriginal Arts Centre is the first wholly indigenous owned art centre and tour operator established in the Kimberley region and one of the oldest continuously operating art centres in Australia, supporting economic independence for artists and their community.

Through WAITOC's support and working with a Development Manager, the centre received feedback on expanding its business model, secured a loan for a bus, badged with the Arts Centre logos, and began tours showing visitors the artists creating their works and visiting Country where the art has been inspired by. This has completely changed the arts centre model and set it up as a more economically sustainable and independent business. The new model is now an inspiration for other arts centres around WA.

## Waringarri Aboriginal Arts Centre, An Aboriginal Tourism Development Program success story





(photo left)  
Minister for Tourism Paul Papalia and Noongar man Walter McGuire during the smoking ceremony at the opening of the Welcome to Country mural at the Western Australia Visitor in Perth.

### 7. Funding for Welcome to Country presence at Visitor Centres

There are 40 accredited Visitor Centres in WA, and for a relatively small investment \$10,000 per centre we could ensure each has a local Aboriginal Welcome.

#### What would it cost?

Up to \$200-400m for a world class Aboriginal Cultural Centre (with assumed leverage of additional contributions from the Commonwealth and private sector).

An additional \$30m (just \$4m annual recurring funding) for:

- An additional \$1.1m pa for WAITOC
- \$3m pa for the Aboriginal Tourism Academy
- At least \$7.5m to begin planning, designing, and constructing five new Aboriginal Cultural centres
- \$15m for six new Camping with Custodians enterprises in regions not currently catered for, from the Gascoyne to Great Southern.
- \$400,000 for Welcome to Country murals or presence at Visitor Centres.

### How many jobs would it create?

In addition to supporting over 400 people already employed in Aboriginal tourism, this package would create 220-1220 jobs including up to 1000 construction jobs on cultural centres.



Kambarang, original artwork by Rickesha Burdett



Welcome to Country mural at WA Visitor Centre

# Links and Downloads



<https://www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au/Pages/McGowan/2019/05/Budget-continues-focus-on-job-creation-and-economic-growth.aspx>



[https://www.tourism.wa.gov.au/About%20Us/Growing\\_tourism/Aboriginal-tourism/Camping\\_with\\_Custodians/Pages/Camping-with-Custodians.aspx#/](https://www.tourism.wa.gov.au/About%20Us/Growing_tourism/Aboriginal-tourism/Camping_with_Custodians/Pages/Camping-with-Custodians.aspx#/)



<https://www.committeeforperth.com.au/assets/documents/reconciliation/Committee-for-Perth-Innovate-Reconciliation-Action-Plan-2019-2021.pdf>



<https://swccnrm.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/FACET-Workshop-Aboriginal-Tourism.pdf>



<https://www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au/Pages/McGowan/2020/08/Massive-76-million-dollar-recovery-package-to-support-culture-and-arts-in-WA.aspx>

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & CONTACTS

*Clean State acknowledges the WA Indigenous Tourism Operators Council (WAITOC) Board, and the Committee for Perth in the development of this package.*



WAITOC.COM

Ancient Tracks, New Journeys