



11 August 2014

The Hon. Ian Hunter MLC  
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Dear Minister

Thank you for your letter outlining some of the key drivers behind the Premier's Boards and Committee Reform.

I welcome the move to review the function and efficiency of Boards and Committees across the South Australian government – particularly in an era of open government and innovative approaches to community engagement.

In response, I write to outline:

- a) Reasons why the Premier should retain the Alinytjara Wilurara (AW) Natural Resources Management Board (the Board), based on the principles of efficiency and independence as outlined in your letter.
- b) The additional value the Board provides the communities of the region and government as a whole.
- c) To outline the possible consequences to community and government, should the Board be abolished; and
- d) A request to discuss with you the possibility of increasing the level of resourcing to the Board in order to support these roles

### **Retaining the Board**

Like other Natural Resources Management (NRM) Boards across South Australia, the Board does an excellent job in partnering with government and community to implement the strategic roles and delivery functions outlined in the State NRM Plan and the NRM Act (2004).

However, in a region where governance and administration are not always as strong as we may desire, the efficient nature of the Board's partnership with government in the AW region is of particularly outstanding value.

As you are aware, the AW NRM region encompasses a small number of Aboriginal landholders, stakeholders and native title owners, including Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY), Maralinga Tjarutja (MT), Yalata, Far West Coast and Antakarinja Matu Yankunytjatjara (AMY). The region has a small population of approximately 3000 people, and the population and its family groups are very well connected.

The Board is made up of key community leaders from each of these stakeholders. Mima Smart, for example, is the Chair of Yalata Community Council, whilst Gary Lewis has a direct connection and influence with APY Executive. Michael Haynes plays a leading role in creating positive social change for Aboriginal people of the Far West Coast, and Rose Lester is extremely well connected to the APY community and senior Traditional Owners.

The Board's composition, therefore, ensures a close, direct and informative (i.e. efficient) line of communication between three key partners - the region's communities, their statutory bodies and government.

Furthermore, the statutory support the government provides Board members to represent their communities allows effective two way communication between communities and government – Board members can express the independent views of their communities, whilst government has the opportunity to discuss its long term visions of community stewardship and participation.

Such a close and well governed partnership which encompasses the entire region and its network of families, can simply not be developed nor delivered by DEWNR staff alone and is of benefit not only for NRM, but for government as a whole.

In considering financial efficiency, the Board commits to look at our processes to ensure they are as efficient as possible relative to the outcomes we are striving to deliver. For example, the Board recently implemented a "paperless" policy that is saving costs, but also importantly improving communication with staff. The Board has also discussed alternative and cheaper options of providing a connection with government, such as social media, teleconferencing, web based platforms and "as required" expert forums.

These forms of engagement, however, are likely to be ineffective because of a lack of engagement in such technology by the community leaders, compounded by the fact that English is a second language for most Board members.

The most culturally appropriate mechanism by which to connect government with the communities and leaders in the AW region (and all other regions, for that matter) is through face-to-face communication and in building personal relationships between Board members, communities and staff.

### **Additional Value**

In striving to work efficiently across all levels of government and to play a leadership role for our communities, the Board is also playing a broader role in the region.

#### *Leadership Development*

Over the past two years, the Board undertook a tailored leadership development program in partnership with government and the Leaders Institute of South Australia. This program focused on governance, strategic thinking, community engagement, personal and team leadership.

The program has seen significant advancement in the leadership qualities of Board members, who now wish to expand the program and play a mentoring role to capture and develop potential future leaders of the region. Such a program will contribute to the Government's State Strategic Plan, in particular SASP Target 28 (Developing Aboriginal Leaders).

There is no other such regionally representative forum that could provide such strategic leadership, in particularly as other Boards and Councils across the region are primarily focused on administrative and operational matters.

#### *NRM and Economic Development*

The Board is also very interested in connecting government, Traditional Owners, Land Holding Authorities and industry in discussing economic development in the region, and in particular the role that broader NRM can play.

Whilst it may not be clear initially, the Board is in fact a key to leading such discussions because of the primacy of "healthy country" to land rights and Tjukurpa (law and culture). The positive social benefits that flow from economic development will only come if such development is sustainable and does not impact on healthy country and culture.

The role that NRM plays in the future economic development in the region, therefore, cannot be understated. The Board recognises that improved employment and social outcomes are reliant on integrated economic development and that this cannot threaten country and culture, and is interested in taking a broader role in this space into the future.

#### *Education, Training and Employment*

Reflecting the importance of country to economic development and Aboriginal employment, Anangu often tell us "there is no greater aspiration nor privilege than to be employed to look after your own country".

Education, training and employment, therefore, is at the centre of the Board's strategic direction and the Board's policies have been critical in influencing your staff to ensure Aboriginal employment is at the core of sustainable NRM across the region.

Currently, the Board is developing an education, training and employment strategy in order to meet an ambitious and inspiring target of increasing Aboriginal Employment to 20% by 2018. The Board strives to capture this employment directly within DEWNR, in contracts with communities and individual Aboriginal contractors and in casual employment.

The Board's policy and strategy, therefore, provides considerable value to the government, contributing to SASP targets 51 (Halve the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal employment rates by 2018) and 53 (Increase the participation of Aboriginal people in the South Australian public sector, spread across all classification and agencies, to 2% by 2014 and maintain or better those levels through to 2020).

## **Risks and Consequences to government and communities**

In considering the possible abolishment of the Board, the most significant consequence will be that government will lose its only well governed, region-wide representative body with which it can partner and trust to provide independent yet two-way communication between government and communities.

This, in turn, this will lead to other significant risks and consequences, including, but not exclusive to:

- Loss of confidence of the Australian Government, which respects NRM Boards as part of a national network through which it can invest Landcare funding. At present, the Board receives on average 66% of its funding from the Australian Government (on average approximately \$2m p.a.). Abolishment of the Board would risk this funding and the delivery of on-ground works which contribute to both Australian and South Australian government priorities.
- The Board has established Palya Kalkuni (“a promise to work together”) agreements with regional land holding authorities in order to strengthen the links with government. Through these MOUs, the Board provides an important avenue and filter for regional land holding authorities to talk to government and share their aspirations and concerns. Abolishment of the Board will remove these partnerships and in turn lead to a loss of confidence in the government and the risk of negative media and possible ongoing complaints to the government.
- The Board plays a key role in influencing consistent approaches to NRM across the region, as well as expert advice on how best to marry cultural and contemporary approaches to NRM. Abolishment of the Board will lead to inconsistent approaches to NRM, risking delivery of key legislation (NRM Act (2004), National Parks and Wildlife Act (1972), South Australian Strategic Plan (SASP), No Species Loss and AW Regional NRM Plan) and legitimately threaten sustainable land management, the environment, important species and cultural sites. In regards to the SASP, abolishing the Board will risk meeting targets 28 (Aboriginal Leadership), 51 and 53 (Aboriginal Employment and Participation), 69 (Lose No species) and 72 (Nature Conservation).
- The Board’s “Community NRM” policy encourages devolution of NRM programs to communities, however only where capacity exists to properly administer and deliver such programs. At present, this policy ensures the Board plays a key role in providing support to individual communities to govern and administer their own programs. Abolishment of the Board, however, will remove this support and may lead to investment directly to community landholders who at present do not have the capacity to administer and deliver program outcomes. This in turn will lead to decreased confidence of the Australian government in investing in NRM in the region, and ongoing failure to met the aspirations of the region’s communities.

- The Board is currently undertaking a key role in planning for the next iteration of our Regional NRM Plan. We have a vision of aligning the planning mechanisms and plans across the region (for both public and private land) so that communities are confident that the Board and government's plan is *their* plan. We believe this will be a strong unifying force in order to leverage funding and in providing consistent approaches for the government. Abolishing the Board will again threaten this approach and be another driver for inconsistent planning and delivery of NRM, furthering risk to cultural sites, healthy country and economic development.

### **Resourcing**

The examples of value adding that I have outlined above are just a small representation of the multiple benefits the Board provides individuals, communities and government across the region.

The combination of regional representation, strategic vision and good governance means the Board is one of government's most important partners in advancing integrated positive environmental and social change in a region which is notoriously challenging for delivering outcomes.

The Board feels it has provided a significant foundation for the region and is at an exciting beginning of implementing well-governed and long-term programs for the state government that can connect numerous government services.

As you are aware, however, the Board receives no levy funding, has a small financial and human resource support base, and is heavily reliant on state appropriation and commonwealth regional delivery funds in order to deliver the priorities of government and communities.

Therefore, whilst we welcome and very much appreciate your recent decision to retain state appropriation for the Board so that it can continue to function, we feel that we will only be able to continue to provide the significant added value (as outlined above) with additional resourcing and possibly function.

Playing a leadership development role for the region, for example, will require additional resources for coordination and delivery, yet we strongly feel that the Board is best placed to deliver this. Likewise, the well governed and regional wide representation of the Board may be able to play a key role in partnering with the Department of State Development in discussing and driving economic development, and the central role that NRM should play for employment in the region.

I would be very interested to discuss these possibilities with yourself and the Premier in the near future, and in the mean time, of course, will continue to work effectively with you both in a strong spirit of partnership.

## Summary

I apologise, Minister, if this letter is a little long. However, I wanted to take the opportunity to outline why you should retain the Board.

The key points are:

- The Board provides a strong, effective and efficient partnership between communities and government.
- The Board provides significant added value to the government through its strong governance, leadership, innovation, and in delivering improved economic, social, environmental and cultural outcomes.

In essence, the Board provides the government with the best partnership spanning the entire AW region, and one that is well governed, strategic in its thinking and inspired in its visions.

If you would like to discuss further, it is best at present to contact the Regional Manager for Natural Resources Alinytjara Wilurara, Matthew Ward ([matthew.ward@sa.gov.au](mailto:matthew.ward@sa.gov.au), 0428 166 023).

Yours sincerely



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