

## MEDIA STATEMENT

9 March 2015

### **GOLDFIELDS LAND & SEA COUNCIL** **Aboriginal Corporation (Representative Body)**

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## **The Forgotten People**

It is with considerable disappointment and disillusionment that the Goldfields Land and Sea Council ('GLSC'), the Native Title Representative Body of the Goldfields and Esperance Region of Western Australia advises that we were unsuccessful in our application to the Commonwealth as part of the "Indigenous Advancement Strategy". This is on top of no historic Commonwealth funding for the proven *Caring for Country* and/or *Working on Country Programs* in this region; no Commonwealth funding for *Indigenous Protected Areas* in this region; no Commonwealth support of an *Aboriginal Green Army Program* in the GLSC's region; no Commonwealth support of an Aboriginal defined *Remote Jobs and Community Program* for the region; and no Commonwealth support of a single Aboriginal person to work on-country and in their own country in the entire GLSC representative body area of Western Australia, which covers over 640,000km<sup>2</sup> (almost 3 times the size of Victoria). However, the government has made previous commitments to have some 730 Aboriginal Rangers trained and employed throughout the Country in its programs by June this year.

The GLSC has an all Aboriginal membership of nearly 1,000 people and provides services to many more with cultural connection to the region; it has an elected, all Aboriginal Board and has proven capabilities in advancing Aboriginal lives and securing a stronger future for Aboriginal people through successful Native Title determinations and tireless efforts to help its members and all Aboriginal people of the region achieve their own and their communities' aspirations.

The GLSC is consistently rebuffed by the Commonwealth with rhetoric such as "fully committed" in regards to proven and effective programs. This is in spite of a recent study conducted by leading academics from the Australian National University which found that 'Aboriginal people in the Goldfields region are amongst the most disadvantaged in the Country'. The study notes that regional centres like Kalgoorlie/Boulder are often ignored as a result of the government's continued focus on a defined set of 'remote communities'.<sup>1</sup>

The GLSC's application was outcomes focused and represented great value for money to the Commonwealth. Some of the outcomes defined in the application included employment, upskilling and retention of 10 local Aboriginal people. The program would have added considerable resources to improving Land and Sea management practices within this region. It would have re-established sustainable food sources for the community through plant regeneration as well as supporting culture and heritage knowledge projects, which are proven to greatly improve morale and empower the Aboriginal community. There would have been an increase in the number of Aboriginal households with a primary income and the flow on economic benefits would have been provided directly to the community at large as these families spend their hard earned dollars in the towns and cities of the Goldfields and Esperance region of Western Australia.

If Aboriginal people are truly to be empowered and advanced, the Commonwealth needs to start respecting and supporting Aboriginal people and their representative institutions and allowing this nation's first peoples to walk towards a future defined by their own aspirations in partnership with Government that truly has a vision to close the gap and ensure every man woman and child of this land has the opportunity for a shared, better and brighter future for all. Unfortunately, for the moment, it seems the Aboriginal people of the Goldfields – Esperance region are not a part of the Commonwealth's game plan.

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<sup>1</sup> Karvelas, P & Elks, S 2013, 'Situation of remote indigenous people often overlooked', *The Australian*, October 10.