

Aboriginal Executive Council (AEC)

Background Information and Terms of Reference

1. Background

At the July 2017 Ministerial Forum on Aboriginal Affairs an ACCO peak organisation raised the need to establish a coordinating state wide policy mechanism between the Aboriginal Community Controlled Sector in Victoria and the Victorian State Government.¹ As an outcome of that forum the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs recommended the establishment of an 'Aboriginal Executive Council' (AEC) and for regular meetings between that council and the Secretaries Leadership Group on Aboriginal Affairs (SLG).

The AEC was subsequently established in early 2018 through discussions between the organisations that now comprise the AEC and the State Government.

In March 2018 the AEC and SLG finalised governance arrangements for regular meetings between the AEC and SLG and between the AEC and the Senior Officers Group (SOG) on Aboriginal Affairs. The AEC and SLG identified whole of government self-determination reform priorities for joint action and work. Areas agreed between the AEC and SLG for advice and for joint work were confirmed as:

- Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework/ Refresh of the Closing the Gap framework
- Funding Reform
- Treaty, and
- Self-determination

To support the functioning of the AEC the State Government agreed to provide some resourcing to each of the 11 AEC member organisations and agreed to resource an AEC Secretariat.

To ensure a consistent approach to implementation of self-determination the AEC, SOG and the State Government Special Adviser on Self Determination drafted 11 guiding principles of self-determination. These principles were endorsed by the AEC and SLG and incorporated into the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework (VAAF)². The Victorian Government has committed that all future actions to advance Aboriginal self-determination will be driven by these principles.

2. AEC Purpose and Functions

The purpose of the Aboriginal Executive Council ('AEC') is to provide an independent self-determining co-ordination, collaboration, policy development and advocacy mechanism for Victoria's peak, lead and state wide Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.

The functions of the AEC include, but are not limited to:

1. Promoting and pursuing the rights and interests of Aboriginal people in Victoria including the right to self-determination
2. Acknowledging and extending the legacy of Aboriginal community members who established and developed the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Sector
3. Providing strategic leadership to further develop and sustain the Aboriginal Community Controlled Sector

¹ VAEAI raised this issue at 2017 Ministerial Forum

² Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework, page 24 available at <https://w.www.vic.gov.au/aboriginalvictoria/policy>

4. Coordinating public policy and advocacy from across its membership
5. Working collaboratively with other Aboriginal Community Controlled bodies including the First Peoples Assembly of Victoria
6. Engaging with the Victorian Government and Parliament to provide expert advice and set the direction for government commitments to Aboriginal self-determination
7. Monitoring and providing publicly available reports on government policy frameworks and commitments including the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs and Closing the Gap frameworks
8. Working with the Victorian Secretaries' Leadership Group on Aboriginal Affairs (SLG) and Senior Officers' Group on Aboriginal Affairs (SOG) to achieve measurable outcomes in support of self-determination and implementation of the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework
9. Encouraging mutual support and collaboration across the AEC's members
10. Communicating and engaging with the Aboriginal community through AEC members
11. Participating on behalf of the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Sector in processes relating to the Closing the Gap framework
12. Influencing other stakeholders with an interest in issues impacting Aboriginal people including the broader community services sector, public entities and authorities and Commonwealth Government Ministers, Departments and agencies.

3. Commitment to Self Determination

The AEC commits to advance the cause of self-determination and carry out its role consistent with the principles of self-determination developed by the AEC, SOG and the Special Adviser on Self Determination and included in the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018-2023. **(See Appendix A.)** This will include participating in AEC meetings in a manner consistent with these principles, representing the AEC in a manner consistent with the principles and advocating for government and other policies, initiatives and strategies that are consistent with the principles.

The AEC is committed to working collaboratively with Governments while maintaining our independence and cultural integrity. We will work towards the maintenance of the sacred and spiritual nature of Aboriginal business in a contemporary society, telling the stories and contributions of our ancient and living cultures. We will seek to eradicate structural and systemic racism through our vision for an equal, informed and empowered Victorian Aboriginal community.

This will include participating in AEC meetings in a manner consistent with these principles and advocating for government and other policies, initiatives and strategies that are consistent with the self-determination principles.

4. AEC Membership

Membership of the AEC is open to peak bodies, state-wide organisations and lead agencies from the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Sector. The AEC is an independent decision-making council comprised of the following organisations:

1. Aborigines Advancement League
2. Aboriginal Housing Victoria
3. Djirra
4. Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
5. Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
6. Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated
7. Victorian Aboriginal Health Service
8. Victorian Aboriginal Legal Services
9. Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd
10. Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations
11. Koorie Youth Council

Other Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled peak bodies, statewide organisations, regional bodies and lead agencies may be admitted to membership of the AEC to support the work of the Council as determined by the AEC.

5. AEC Roles and Responsibilities

The AEC will:

1. Develop, monitor and review a Strategic Plan and associated work plans that identify priorities and actions to advance the purpose and functions of the AEC
2. Engage the broader Victorian Aboriginal community through its members to inform its work and in developing advice for government
3. Collaborate with SLG and SOG to:
 - a. provide strategic advocacy and policy advice to SLG and government to set and guide the direction for government to deliver on its commitment to self-determination for the Aboriginal community of Victoria
 - b. collaborate with government to develop agreed priorities for the self-determination of Aboriginal people, and agreed implementation governance, protocols and practices
4. Establish and maintain systems and processes for the transparent management of its resources and secretariat functions
5. Having regard to available resources the AEC will engage any professional services it deems necessary to properly carry out its roles and responsibilities
6. Review these terms of reference at least every two years

Each member of the AEC will:

1. Participate in AEC meetings and forums including AEC/SLG and AEC/SOG meetings in a manner consistent with respectful consensus decision making
2. Contribute their expertise and advice and work collaboratively with other AEC members and stakeholders

6. AEC Contact Details and Secretariat

The AEC maintains a secretariat to support its functions and operations. General inquiries should be directed to the AEC Executive Officer. Formal correspondence should be directed to the AEC Chairperson

Contact Details

Julian Pocock - AEC Executive Officer
Aboriginal Executive Council (AEC)
C/- Aborigines Advancement League
2 Watt Street Thornbury VIC 3071
phone: 03 9480 7777

Esme Bamblett - AEC Chairperson
CEO Aborigines Advancement League
2 Watt Street Thornbury VIC 3071
phone: 03 9480 7777

Appendix A – Self Determination Guiding Principles

Human Rights

Self-determination initiatives honour the norms set out in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) and Victoria's Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006.

Cultural Integrity

As First Nations peoples, the rich, thriving cultures, knowledge and diverse experiences of Aboriginal people, including where they fit with family, community and society, will be recognised, valued, heard and celebrated.

Commitment

Aboriginal self-determination will be advanced and embedded through planned action that is endorsed by, and accountable to, all parties.

Aboriginal Expertise

Government and agencies will seek out, value and embed Aboriginal culture, knowledge, expertise and diverse perspectives in policies and practice.

Partnership

Partnerships will advance Aboriginal autonomy through equitable participation, shared authority and decision-making, and will be underpinned by cultural integrity.

Decision Making

Decision-makers will respect the right to free, prior and informed consent and individual choice and will prioritise the transfer of decision-making power to Aboriginal people in areas that impact their communities.

Empowerment

Aboriginal people will have autonomy and participation in the development, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of legislation, policies and programs that impact their communities.

Cultural Safety

Programs and services accessed by Aboriginal people will be inclusive, respectful, responsive and relevant, and informed by culturally safe practice frameworks.

Investment

Investment to support self-determination will be sustainable, flexible and appropriate to strengthen Aboriginal peoples' aspirations and participation, including around economic participation, economic independence and building wealth.

Equity

Systemic and structural racism, discrimination and unconscious bias and other barriers to Aboriginal self-determination will be actively identified and eliminated.

Accountability

All parties responsible for delivering outcomes involving Aboriginal people will be held accountable and subject to Aboriginal-led, independent and transparent oversight.