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LOCAL DECISIONS TO GIVE POWER TO THE PEOPLE

Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Victor Dominello today announced the Illawarra, Far West and North Coast communities will take part in Local Decision Making, a major initiative to grow capacity and increase decision making powers in Aboriginal communities.

Local Decision Making is a key initiative of OCHRE (Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment), the NSW Government’s plan for Aboriginal affairs.

The Aboriginal regional alliances selected, following an Expression of Interest (EoI) process are:

- Illawarra and Wingecarribee RPA – Illawarra South East;
- Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly – Far Western NSW; and
- Many Rivers Regional Coalition of Peak Organisations – North Coast

“Local Decision Making represents a landmark change to the way Aboriginal communities and government agencies work together,” Mr Dominello said.

“We want to build on existing leadership capacity in local Aboriginal communities through training to improve probity and ethics, leadership, financial accountability and management skills,” he said.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner from the Australian Human Rights Commission, Mick Gooda said he welcomed the NSW Government’s Local Decision Making initiative.

“This is an important reform because it empowers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in NSW to change the conversation with government. It will ensure that accountability becomes a two-way street, with government and local communities working towards a common goal,” he said.

Mr Gooda said that for too long governments had failed to genuinely engage with Aboriginal communities to decide which government services they need at the local level.

“That’s why it makes sense for local leaders – who understand their own community better than anyone – to have more control over the decisions that affect them,” he said.

Chair of Illawarra Aboriginal Regional Alliance Darrell Brown said the community was delighted to be selected as a pilot for Local Decision Making.
“This is unbelievable news and a fantastic opportunity for our community. We are very proud to be selected as one of the three sites across NSW to part of this important initiative.

“This has only become possible because all of our Aboriginal regional alliance partners united to achieve this one common goal. It is the pinnacle of our combined efforts,” Mr Brown said.

Mr Dominello said decision making power would transfer to local communities gradually and only after accountability benchmarks were met.

“Once local communities demonstrate high standards of governance they can have greater control in planning and services.

“It is a staged process of power-sharing based on performance and capacity,” he said.

The Illawarra-Wingecarribee, Far West and North Coast alliances were chosen because of the strength of their existing governance and leadership capacity.

Mr Dominello flagged that additional Local Decision Making locations would be announced in the second half of 2014, based on the strength of applications in the current EoI round.

“I am encouraged by the strong response from Aboriginal communities across NSW. There was a strong desire to be part of the first phase of Local Decision Making,” Mr Dominello said.

“The initial phase will be monitored and evaluated for three years, and if successful it will be rolled out in other areas,” he said.

Local Decision Making has been used successfully to improve community governance and government service delivery for Indigenous populations in Canada, New Zealand and the United States.

“Ultimately, it’s about ensuring that Aboriginal communities have a genuine voice in determining what services they need,” Mr Dominello said.

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