

30 September 2019

Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety Building and Energy
Plumbing Review Team
Locked Bag 100
EAST PERTH WA 6892

Via email: plumbingreview@dmirs.wa.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

REMOTE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES PLUMBING SCHEME

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the consultation process regarding the Western Australian Government Review of the Remote Aboriginal Communities Plumbing Scheme (the Scheme).

This letter is a joint response to the issues canvassed in the Consultation Paper (Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety Building and Energy, September 2019) by the Plumbing and Pipe Trades Employees Union (PPTU) and the Plumbing Industry Climate Action Centre (PICAC).

PICAC and its partner organisations, the Master Plumbers and Mechanical Services Association of Australia and the PPTU, are strongly opposed to the Scheme, both in its current form and in any revised or expanded form.

Our primary objection is on a point of principle. That principle is every Australian should be entitled to safe water and sanitation, regardless of their race, or where they live. The Scheme undermines that principle and gives tacit endorsement to a two-tiered system which is tantamount to water and sanitation apartheid.

Plumbing by its very nature involves a series of risks to individual and community health and well-being. Many of the more relevant risks (Trachoma) relating to Indigenous communities are correctly outlined and explained in the Discussion Paper. There are others associated with every element of plumbing, be it water borne bacteria and disease outbreaks; scolding risks from not fit for purpose taps or fittings; lead leaching out of corroding pipes; or the risks associated with ineffective or non-functioning backflow prevention devices.

In every non-Indigenous community in Australia, only licensed or registered plumbing practitioners are permitted to work on plumbing installations or repairs. Allowing non-plumbers to work on plumbing installations which would otherwise (if it was anywhere else in Australia) be within the scope of qualified plumbers, drives up risks for those Indigenous communities. It also signals to communities that they are less important than non-Indigenous communities, undermines efforts to foster the take up by Indigenous Australians of licence level trades training, and undermines the integrity of the overall plumbing system which is only as strong as its weakest point.

The level of risk associated with plumbing works in remote Indigenous communities is already significantly higher than in other parts of the country. The infrastructure is older, less well maintained and therefore less safe. Drinking water for the entire community often comes from local, unregulated sources like rainwater tanks or is pumped from a local natural source. This combined with the challenging environment and changing weather and rainfall patterns can be extremely hazardous to residents of these communities.

This risk profile increases, rather than decreases, the need for appropriately trained and qualified plumbers with less qualified and less regulated operators only adding to the risk.

We cannot stress enough our fundamental objection to the Scheme. To continue with it – or to broaden its scope as flagged in the latest Discussion Paper - would broaden “the gap” between the health and opportunities for Indigenous Australians and non-Indigenous Australians rather than closing it.

We, along with our industry partners, would like to see the Scheme, which we believe is short-sighted, dispensed with and for the focus of government efforts be around working collaboratively with the Industry and the communities with a view to training up more qualified Indigenous plumbers.

Our strong view is that these longer-term options should be the priority in terms of meeting the needs of the remote communities with longer term options that do not compromise quality or safety whilst championing fairness and equality.

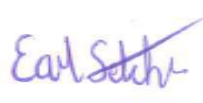
We believe an holistic approach is required and we would be happy to meet with the Plumbing Review Team to discuss longer term options to meet health challenges of remote communities as well Indigenous employment and training.

Should you wish to discuss any of the matters raised in this letter, or if we can provide further information, please contact Shayne La Combre, Chief Executive Officer, PICAC on (03) 9356 8955 or via email: shayne@picac.vic.edu.au .

Yours sincerely



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Chief Executive Officer
PICAC



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