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Information Resources Manager

IPWEAQ’s Native Title and Cultural Heritage (NT/CH) Portal project is well underway and has now reached the stage of IT development. That means all the groundwork has been completed, in the form of extensive process mapping and flowcharting of the complex legislation and various segments that make up the compliance system. All these materials are now in the hands of our developers.

The first fruits of those labours will be presented at the IPWEAQ Annual Conference in October. We are holding a Moot Court as one of the conference sessions, in which the people from Marrawah Law will present a scenario showing some of the consequences that arise from non-compliance with the Native Title Act (1993). This session will be followed by a presentation of the first prototype of the portal, demonstrating how it can be used as a tool to ensure public works infrastructure is undertaken in strict accordance with the law.

Equally importantly, it will also offer a way to extend due respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander law and customs, and the cultural heritage that exists out of their long occupancy of the land. The Cultural Heritage element of the portal will guide users through the various conditions and requirements that must be satisfied to ensure minimal harm is done when carrying out public works projects upon land which is likely to contain artefacts, natural features or areas of cultural significance. It will provide the legislative requirements needed, as well as offer guidance as to which Aboriginal party should be consulted, and the appropriate manner is which that consultation should be undertaken.

IPWEAQ is committed to having the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples included as part of the portal development and have been working to ensure that happens. We are currently in the process of forming an expert advisory group composed of mainly Indigenous members working within the law, academia, and non-government organisations, who can provide feedback and direction to updates and reports that will be sent to them at every step of the development.

We are also engaging an intern from Griffith University’s Gumurrii centre, a dedicated support unit for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. That intern will work closely with the IPWEAQ staff to make certain all matters of cultural sensitivity are handled in accordance with the respect and diligence due them.

In response to interest raised at the NT/CH Seminar hosted by Central Highlands Regional Council at Emerald in June, we are making a list of council offices across the state who are tasked with Native Title and Cultural Heritage work. This will enable us to form a communication group for sharing ideas and ensuring we address the needs of people doing the hands-on work of compliance, and incorporate those needs into the portal development. This group will also be vital when it comes to asking councils to do testing of the tool for us in order to get feedback and make any adjustments that are deemed necessary. IPWEAQ will also be providing a complete backup service to users, who will be able to call our office at any point of the process with queries or for advice on the compliance system or practical workings of the portal.

Any councils who would like to be included in that working group can send the contact details for their Native Title and/or Cultural Heritage officer to Mark.Lamont@ipweaq.com and I will keep them up-to-date with the project.