



MEDIA STATEMENT

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“We are Here to Protect the River that has Sustained us for Thousands of Years”: **Kimberley Aboriginal Leaders Call for Protection of Ancient River**

Kimberley leaders gathered on Gooniyandi country to call for the protection of the Martuwarra Fitzroy River last week, marking one year since the WA Government received a record-breaking 43,000 submissions calling for its protection.

The leaders gathered at the joint Annual General Meetings of the Kimberley Land Council, Kimberley Language Resources Centre, Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre and Aarnja at Kupartiya Community. Throughout the meetings the proposed development of the river was highlighted as a major concern for Traditional Owners.

Known as the lifeblood of the Kimberley, the river spans over 700 km in length and sustains the country of Traditional Owner groups right throughout the region. The Martuwarra is national-heritage listed for its significant values, and the fresh water from the river supports healthy coral reef, mangrove, fish and wildlife populations throughout the Kimberley.

The WA Government is considering whether to allocate vast amounts of ground and surface water from the Martuwarra Fitzroy river for proposed dam and irrigation projects.

The KLC and Kimberley Traditional Owners are calling for the entire length of the Martuwarra to be protected, and damaging large-scale irrigation proposals to be rejected.

KLC Board Member and Nykina man Robert Watson said it is important the Government acknowledges and responds to the concerns of Traditional Owners at a critical moment in time for the Kimberley.

“We are standing here calling for the protection the river that has sustained us for thousands of years,” Mr Watson said.

“We’re at the brink after 150 years of pastoralism, we’re now moving into the bigger phase of agriculture along the river, and the impacts could be astronomical, if we don’t get the balance right.”

Walmajarri Elder, Mr. Joe Brown sang in language in support for the Martuwarra during the KLC’s AGM, highlighting the river’s protection as his top concern.

“I’ve got concern about the future of this river. I was born in the river, and my father came from life in the bush. That river is our main water source. What are we going to do if it is destroyed?”

KLC CEO Tyronne said the message from Kimberley Traditional Owners is united, the river must be protected.

“Our members hold serious concerns about the future of the Martuwarra Fitzroy River and its tributaries. Plans for large-scale irrigation will lead to irreversible damage for the river.”

“Kimberley Aboriginal people have native title rights throughout the entirety of the river. Our concerns about the future of this significant river system must not be ignored and we have never consented to the extraction of water from the river. We continue to oppose the development of the river and its floodplains,” Mr Garstone said.

“Our connection to the Martuwarra, the lifeblood of the Kimberley, is through our culture and its protection must be Australia’s priority.”

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