



## MEDIA STATEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **“The eyes of the world are on you”: The Kimberley Land Council warns McGowan Government after passing Heritage laws**

The Kimberley Land Council has warned the McGowan Government that the world will be watching after controversial heritage laws passed through Parliament yesterday.

The *Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Bill (2021)* has passed through parliament less than a month after it was introduced, despite widespread resistance from Aboriginal people, industry leaders, State and Federal politicians nation-wide.

KLC CEO Tyrone Garstone said the legislation reform was historic, but not for the right reasons.

“The McGowan Government’s reform of the heritage legislation, which they referred to as the most progressive in the country, will be remembered as a disastrous moment for Aboriginal heritage protection. This is not progress. Calling it progressive is a reflection of how bad the previous legislation was.”

“The McGowan Government has wasted an opportunity to create legislation that strikes a balance between development and heritage protection. This Bill continues to expose Aboriginal heritage to destruction and disempowers Traditional Owners to speak for their country.”

“In a state where the economy is driven by the mining and resource sector, once again, the needs of industry trump everyone else.”

KLC Chair Anthony Watson said he felt deep sadness seeing the Bill passed, noting a chance to move towards genuine reconciliation had been wasted.

“It’s a devastating day for our heritage. The Government has wasted this once in a generation opportunity to make change, and it will be at the expense of our irreplaceable dreaming sites,” he said.

“Once again, Aboriginal people have not been listened to, not been respected and our culture has been left vulnerable to destruction.

“By passing this Bill despite widespread resistance from Aboriginal leaders, the McGowan Government has disregarded a genuine commitment to reconciliation.

“When questioned in Parliament, the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Stephen Dawson, was only able to name three individual Aboriginal people who supported the Bill, and neglected to acknowledge the overwhelming majority who hold grave concerns. The Minister has misrepresented the views of the Aboriginal people.”

“We will continue to challenge the Government and hold them accountable. We will be watching, and we will let them know, the eyes of the world are on you.”

Mr. Watson said he wanted to use this moment to call on Australia and the world to hold the WA Government accountable.

“An overwhelming majority of Aboriginal groups in Western Australia and around the nation were in opposition to the Bill,” he said.

“Australians value Aboriginal heritage. In the wake of the destruction of Juukan Gorge, Australians have shown that they oppose the destruction of our living culture. The shockwaves were felt around the world. Governments who ignore this do so at their peril.”

The KLC has been voicing the concerns of Traditional Owners and opposition to the heritage legislation from Prescribed Bodies Corporate in the Kimberley region since the first draft of the Bill was released last October.

The McGowan Government ignored concerns raised by Traditional Owners, PBCs, Land Councils and heritage experts repeatedly, and failed to be transparent with changes made to the legislation, only providing an amended version of the Bill less than 24 hours before it was introduced to Parliament late last month. The Bill has been hastily pushed through, with normal parliamentary processes suspended to fast-track the legislation through the Parliament of Western Australia.

ENDS.

Gabrielle Timmins, Media Coordinator

M: 0408 436 987 E: [gabrielle.timmins@klc.org.au](mailto:gabrielle.timmins@klc.org.au)

P.O. BOX 2145 BROOME WA 6725 Ph: (08) 9194 0100

[www.klc.org.au](http://www.klc.org.au)