



September 29, 2017

KLC, KALACC, KLRC and Aarnja joint statement

Our ancestors walked this land for thousands upon thousands of years. They had laws, languages and cultures that survive until this day.

We are gathered here at Lombadina/Djarindjin communities for three days of deliberations as part of our four peak organisations' annual general meetings. During this week we display our continued connection to traditional lands and the continued practice of our languages and cultures.

Fifty years ago Australia voted yes to change the constitution and twenty-five years ago the Mabo decision was handed down recognising our rights to the land. Today, the Federal Court recognises Kimberley Aboriginal people as the traditional land owners of 80 per cent of this region.

But in 2017, Aboriginal people are yet again on the wrong side of social indicators as proven by this year's Closing the Gap report. We still have one of the worst suicide rates in the country and the world, and we are still failing to carve out a positive future for our children.

Despite continued acknowledgement of the importance of our cultural practices, actions speak louder than words. Government support for our continued cultural practices only represents three quarters of a per cent of the total Aboriginal budget.

Languages are the core of our land and cultures. We are still waiting for a government to publicly acknowledge our human right to speak our languages and to work with us on appropriate ways of reclaiming, reviving and maintaining languages to ensure our continued connection to land and practicing of culture.

The Federal and previous WA State Liberal and National Government said they wanted to work with us through Empowered Communities to deliver outcomes for our people on the ground. Instead they decided to prioritise matters for Aboriginal people according to Mr Andrew Forrest's Creating Parity report. Once again doing things to Aboriginal people rather than with them.

The previous State Government failed to recognise our native title rights to make an income. They never acknowledged our rights to generate income from carbon trading. And they never recognised our rights to sustain our remote communities or protect our heritage.

The previous Premier said he "didn't want to see...the Kimberley tied up in conservation or by Aboriginal corporations where you get unproductive stations and a lack of control of feral species".

Nothing can be further from the truth. Positive legacies are created by working with us. Aboriginal people get their native title and should be able to determine what they do on their land.

We challenge the new Western Australian Labor Government not to be like the last – a Liberal National Government which sought to shut us out completely.

We call on the McGowan Government to work with us. You have a unique opportunity to truly change the conversation about Aboriginal affairs in this state. Time is of the essence.

We are still waiting for action on the protection of the Fitzroy River. We are still waiting for real action on the divestment of ALT lands. This is not the first time we have heard a promise from a Labor or a Liberal Government to transfer lands back to the rightful owners.

Our Member for the Kimberley, Josie Farrer, has worked hard to have Aboriginal people recognised in the WA constitution. Now we want to bring force to those words to truly reflect this recognition.

We, the Kimberley mob, endorse and support the Uluru statement. We call on the Australian Government and Opposition to support a referendum on a voice in the constitution and we call again on the WA Labor Government to engage with us and Indigenous people throughout the state about a process of comprehensive settlements.

The Kimberley Land Council, Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Cultural Centre, Kimberley Language Resource Centre and Aarnja call on the State Government to prioritise funding and support for the following areas:

- **Respect and recognition of native title** – Native title should be seen as an opportunity, not a barrier. We want native title to be recognised as being equal to other property rights in Western Australia.
- **Language** – Kimberley Aboriginal languages are primarily oral languages. We need support for our goal of teaching on country to ensure the continuation of languages and knowledge. Programs such as language nests should be resourced Kimberley-wide. New technologies are needed to make written resources accessible to language groups. Funding should be directed to ensure Aboriginal languages interpreters are readily available across the region. Genuine collaboration is needed to ensure that languages and knowledge are integrated into the western education system.
- **Culture** – We need proper support for our cultural practice. Culture is the fundamental authority for our connection and decision making for our land.
- **Land tenure reform** – It is not right to extinguish native title merely for development certainty. We need land tenure reform that supports and sustains native title.
- **Aboriginal Heritage Protection** – We require assurance that Aboriginal heritage will be given the highest level of protection.
- **Economic development** – Companies should not be able to develop projects without a native title impacts agreement. We, the Traditional Owners, want the opportunity to develop our lands for the benefit of our regions and the nation.
- **Strong families and communities** – We call for urgent action to address the significant overrepresentation of Aboriginal children being removed from families and taken into out of home care. We want a government that supports us to strengthen our communities with our right to free, prior and informed consent at the forefront of any policies designed to help our mob.
- **Engagement** – Commit to a process of engagement so we can sit at the table as equals. We require long term commitments to plan and jointly decide long-term resourcing which focusses on family development designed by and for local people.

Agreed to and endorsed at the combined AGMs of KLC, KALACC, KLRC and Aarnja Sep 19 – 21.

Anthony Watson, Chairman, KLC

Frank Davey and **Merle Carter**, Chairs, KALACC

Patsy Bedford, Chairperson, KLRC

Marty Sibosado, Chairman, Aarnja