



Kimberley Land Council

MEDIA RELEASE

October 16, 2017

Kimberley rangers off to Africa

Three Indigenous rangers from the Kimberley will soon embark on a once-in-a-lifetime journey to Kenya, Africa, to connect with Maasai community rangers in their tribal homelands.

The Maasai Mara National Reserve is a large game reserve in Narok County, Kenya, that joins with the Serengeti National Park in Tanzania and is globally famous for its populations of lions, leopards, cheetahs, zebras, gazelles, spotted hyenas, elephants, wildebeests and more.

The Maasai people are the ancestral inhabitants of the area and Maasai community rangers look after wildlife in the region, which face threats from agriculture, poaching, overpopulation, road building and development.

Kimberley Land Council Deputy Chief Executive Officer Tyronne Garstone said the world-first conservation and cultural exchange program will provide an opportunity for Indigenous rangers from Australia to share knowledge, culture and in-the-field experiences with their Maasai colleagues.

“This opportunity will enable our rangers to develop a greater understanding of the challenges faced by other Indigenous rangers across the world,” Mr Garstone said.

“There will be similarities and big differences, but what is for sure is that all participants will have a common bond in their determination to look after endangered species.”

The trip will be an eye opening experience for its Kimberley participants – Kija Head Ranger Imran Paddy, Gooniyandi Head Ranger Virgil Cherel and Nyikina Mangala Ranger Conan Lee. None of them have been overseas before and have applied for passports for the very first time.

Imran said the exchange would provide an opportunity to learn more about the issue of poaching in Africa.

“It makes me sad to understand about the decreasing numbers of rhinos and elephants,” Imran said.

“I would like to go to Kenya to learn more about the work they do, the training and I hope this knowledge and experience I can bring back to my community.”

Virgil said meeting other rangers and understanding their work would be a highlight of the trip.

“I would like to learn how they work, how they protect their animals, what sort of equipment they use, learn about their culture, how people live and see how they dance - maybe have a go,” he said.

And Conan is keen to compare the similarities of ranger work across continents.

“The Maasai Mara and the African rangers are very interesting people,” he said.

“They are doing the same kind of work that we are trying to do – keeping populations of wildlife healthy as well as keeping the cultural side of things very strong.”

The Kija, Gooniyandi and Nyikina Mangala ranger groups are part of the Kimberley Land Council facilitated Kimberley Ranger Network.

The exchange has been organised and will be led by The Thin Green Line Foundation founder, Sean Willmore, with support from local NGO partner, Big Life Foundation. Founded in 2010, Big Life was the first organisation in East Africa to establish coordinated cross-border anti-poaching operations.

The Maasai rangers risk their lives to prevent poaching of wildlife in the Maasai Mara National Reserve and sadly, many rangers have been killed in the line of duty.