



## MEDIA STATEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **‘Cultural Catastrophe’: KLC warns on heritage bill**

The Kimberley Land Council has warned of a ‘cultural catastrophe’ as the WA Government push forward with its heritage bill after repeated calls for change remain ignored.

The Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Bill, introduced to WA parliament today, has received widespread condemnation, with Aboriginal leaders and heritage experts from across the state voicing their concerns.

KLC CEO, Tyronne Garstone, said it was disappointing the Government had ignored these concerns.

“It’s a devastating day for Aboriginal heritage,” Mr Garstone said.

“We have repeatedly called on the McGowan Government to pause this Bill and make the changes required to ensure Aboriginal heritage is protected. By ignoring our concerns the McGowan Government has treated Aboriginal people beneath contempt.”

“Fundamentally, this Bill will not protect Aboriginal cultural heritage and will continue a pattern of systematic structural racial discrimination against Aboriginal people.”

The KLC received a copy of the amended Bill last night, less than 24 hours before it was introduced to Parliament.

Mr Garstone said the decision to push the Bill forward, despite Aboriginal people’s ongoing opposition, exemplified the ongoing power imbalance between government, industry and Traditional Owners.

“The majority Labor government has become arrogant in their approach, ignoring the calls of a minority to drive their own agenda.”

“The State Government has proved it is too close to industry and too dependent on royalties to be objective and transparent when it comes to matters concerning Aboriginal heritage.”

KLC Chair, Anthony Watson, said the disrespect shown by the Government is typical of the attitude that leads to heritage destruction in the first place.

“Aboriginal people are ‘included’ in the process, only to be left without any influence over the outcome,” he said.

“The Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Bill 2021 is whitewashing. Aboriginal concerns about Aboriginal heritage have been ignored. Once again, decisions about heritage will be made by non-Aboriginal people.”

“This legislation was supposed to be a reform. We cannot see how it improves protection of sites that cannot be replaced.”

The proposed laws fundamentally won’t protect Aboriginal Heritage in Western Australia, a need brought into sharp focus by recent tragedies at Juukan Gorge and at the Garnkiny and Jawaren sites in the East Kimberley. Ignoring the wishes of Traditional Owners is a lost opportunity for the McGowan Government at a time when commitment for change and a better future for Aboriginal people has never been more important.

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