



Kimberley Land Council

MEDIA RELEASE

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KLC calls for constitutional reform on historic 40th anniversary

The Kimberley Land Council will make history this week, officially celebrating 40 years of standing up for the rights of Kimberley Aboriginal people.

The organisation, one of the most successful native title representative bodies in the nation, started its journey in 1978 as a grass roots movement of Kimberley Aboriginal people to protect land, law and culture.

Kimberley Land Council Chairman Anthony Watson said the 40th anniversary will be marked with a week-long celebration at Ngumpan community, starting today with the re-enactment of the historic Noonkanbah march.

The event, which is expected to attract more than 800 people, will close with a special performance by the family and founding members of Yothu Yindi. The late Mr Yunupingu attended the very first meeting of the KLC at Noonkanbah together with the Yirrkala dancers.

“The 40th anniversary of the KLC is an historic event not just for Aboriginal people but the whole of the Kimberley,” Mr Watson said.

“The KLC has come from humble beginnings to become one of the strongest voices on Aboriginal issues locally, nationally and internationally.

“We will be honouring our old guard, on whose shoulders the KLC stands today, and calling on our next generation of leaders to take up the charge. We thank everyone who has contributed to the KLC and supported us in our mission to get back country, look after country and get control of the future.”

KLC Acting CEO Tyronne Garstone said the anniversary is also a time to reflect on the issues that continue to prevail for the Kimberley mob.

“We have come a long way since 1978, but we still have a difficult journey ahead,” Mr Garstone said. “The consequences of colonisation are enduring. Our young people are suffering and the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is ever widening.

“In 2020, Australia marks the 250th anniversary of the arrival of Captain Cook. There is no better time for Australia to right the wrongs of the past and deliver real recognition and representation for our Indigenous brothers and sisters.

“We call on the Australian Government to commit to constitutional reform and a referendum, fulfilling the

wishes of First Nations people. It is only by changing the systems, policies and structures that perpetuate the status quo that we will ever see progress for our people.”

Since forming at Noonkanbah in 1978, the KLC has been at the forefront of issues affecting Aboriginal people. One of the organisation’s first major battles unfolded at Noonkanbah in the late 1970s, when international mining company Amax, supported by the Western Australian Government, wanted to drill for oil on sacred ground.

Kimberley Aboriginal people travelled from all over the region to support the Yungngora people and protest against the mine, resulting in national and international media attention.

In 1993, the KLC was recognised as the native title representative body for the Kimberley. Since that time there have been 32 successful native title determinations in the Kimberley region and approximately 80 per cent of the Kimberley is now native title determined.

The KLC has led the charge on a range of issues affecting the Kimberley mob, including most recently the threatened closure of Aboriginal communities, the protection of native title rights and interests, the expansion of Indigenous ranger programs and the push for constitutional reform.

More than 800 people are expected to attend the 40th anniversary event at Ngumpan community, which is located approximately 90km from Fitzroy Crossing.

The celebration will include a re-enactment of the original KLC march at Noonkanbah, cultural performances, speeches by KLC leaders, a documentary screening and entertainment for young and old.

The event also coincides with the official AGMs of the KLC, Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre, Kimberley Language Resource Centre and Aarnja.

Professional photographs and vision of the Noonkanbah march re-enactment will be available from this evening.

Additional resources for media attached including:

- Key events in KLC history timeline
- Kimberley native title map
- First meeting of the KLC newsletter excerpt
- Original Noonkanbah dispute images – copyright Michael Gallagher