



September 20, 2018

The Ngumpan Statement

Welcome to the Kimberley and this very significant meeting – the 40th anniversary of the Kimberley Land Council and the joint AGMs of the KLC, Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre, Kimberley Language Resource Centre and Aarnja.

We gather here this week on important ground at Ngumpan. Our law, language and culture is strong. It has been practiced by our fathers and mothers, and their fathers and mothers before them for time immemorial. Culture and language is and will always be the foundation of our people.

Forty years ago we stood at Noonkanbah to assert our rights to self-determination, to protect our land and our sacred places. In 2018 we do the same, and although we have come a long way, with 80 per cent of the Kimberley native title determined, we continue to face challenges and our people continue to suffer. Throughout the past three days, the members of our key regional organisations have been considering these issues that confront the Kimberley mob.

We support the message from the Uluru Statement from the Heart calling for an Aboriginal Voice in the Constitution. Our 40 year struggle has been about exactly this, recognition for our people, and we ask that you support these wishes and the call for a Voice for First Nations. This is about human rights and having the type of rights that other people are afforded.

We ask for greater support of Registered Native Title Prescribed Bodies Corporates who have received their native title but lack funding support to build their capacity and capability in order to run their native title and develop economic and commercial opportunities.

We also have strong cultural governance in the Kimberley and peak organisations here to represent us. They should not be ignored. They must be respected and included. We question the need for a state advocacy role when we already have these organisations in place. Work with us and listen to what we have to say. We know what works and what doesn't.

Over many years, governments have failed to recognise our native title rights as a vehicle to earn an income and create culturally appropriate economic opportunities. We need the ability to use our lands for economic and other purposes and we call for real consideration and action on a new form of Aboriginal land tenure that will finally allow this to happen. We, the First Nations of this region, deserve this opportunity as much as any other and we shouldn't have to give up our native title rights to do so.

Last year we challenged the West Australian State Government to take a new approach to Aboriginal affairs and we acknowledge the commitment they have made to some of the key issues, such as the divestment of the Aboriginal Lands Trust and the protection of the Fitzroy River.

We applaud their announcement today of \$500,000 to assist with the maintenance of our law, language and culture. We have the longest living civilisation on this planet and that should be celebrated, supported and seen as key to tackling the challenges faced by Kimberley people.

We are also heartened by the commitment to a process of direct engagement with the Office of the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs for the Kimberley's four peak regional organisations. This will make it easier for our voice to be heard on regional issues and we expect that these views will be used to improve the way government policy is delivered in the Kimberley.

This week, Kimberley people endorsed Kimberley Futures to be the Empowered Communities regional authority model for joint decision making. This is a concept that was developed by Kimberley people more than 20 years ago to finally give us a say about how funding and services are delivered to our communities. We ask that you honour the calls of our

mob, which have been consistent for two decades, and commit to place based and cultural decision making.

We confirm our concern about our living water, the Fitzroy River, and the future pressure from government and industry on this precious resource. Traditional Owners have native title rights all along the river, and we must be able to drive its management and be at the centre of looking after it. We know that people want to use this water and we want them to respect our responsibilities under our native title to look after our river systems and water.

On the 20th of September 2018, during the 40th anniversary of the Kimberley Land Council, an organisation born from the land, the law and the culture of our people, we challenge governments to make sure that 40 years from now we're not still fighting for the same issues.

These goals will only be achieved if Kimberley Aboriginal people can participate, lead and determine the development of socio-economic, cultural and governance strategies and programs delivered in our region. We want to work together as constructive partners to improve the lives and social emotional wellbeing of our people – their children and their families. We want our role in this process be acknowledged and resourced to deliver successful, meaningful and long-lasting outcomes.

We are encouraged by the statements of government in trying to understand our needs. We urge you to continue this journey with us so we can be strong for our children, their children and generations to come.