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MEDIA STATEMENT – YAKKA MUNGA REHABILITATION

The Kimberley Land Council together with the Nyikina Mangala Traditional Owners have welcomed today's State Government announcement ordering the rehabilitation of Yakka Munga Station after illegal clearing at the site.

"The WA Government's condemnation of the illegal clearing at Yakka Munga and its strong stance on rehabilitation of the land is an important step forward," Kimberley Land Council Deputy CEO Tyrone Garstone said.

"The Nyikina Mangala Traditional Owners have shown that anyone can stand up to big business, fight for what is right and win.

"We are still at a loss as to how such destruction could have occurred when there is an Aboriginal Heritage Act that is meant to protect the cultural values of Traditional Owners.

"The Aboriginal Heritage Act has failed the Nyikina Mangala people and it is vitally important that this is taken into account as the government looks to overhaul this ineffective piece of legislation."

Nyikina Mangala Traditional Owner Rosita Shaw said it is critical that before any rehabilitation work occurs, a full environmental, cultural and heritage survey must be undertaken at the site.

"Any rehabilitation of Yakka Munga Station must occur with the consent of the Nyikina Mangala Traditional Owners and with us involved from the beginning to the end," she said.

"This area was populated by our ancestors and is home to spiritual beings that have lived in the trees, spoken Nyikina and protected and looked after our people.

"Before they put the land back we need to document not only the damage that has occurred, but all of the environmental and cultural values of this area because this is our library we are talking about.

"The wilful destruction of our land highlights why we need a strengthened Aboriginal Heritage Act for Aboriginal people in the Kimberley and all over Western Australia."

Damien Parriman, CEO of Walalakoo Aboriginal Corporation, the Prescribed Body Corporate for the Nyikina Mangala people, said the decision serves as a reminder that this is not how business is done in the Kimberley.

"The native title rights and cultural values of Traditional Owners must be acknowledged and respected as key stakeholders on their traditional lands," he said.

"This situation is a reminder to us that we cannot simply rely on the good faith of those who want to develop the Kimberley to respect our rights and values. Clarity and certainty in the various State and Federal statutory frameworks is required if we are to avoid this situation occurring again."