



Kimberley Land Council

MEDIA RELEASE

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Closing the Gap requires investment in Indigenous enterprises and jobs

Closing the gap in employment and education requires investment in Indigenous enterprises and communities, the Kimberley Land Council says.

Chairman of the peak Indigenous organisation Anthony Watson said he welcomed the Federal Government's Closing the Gap report but was not surprised by the lack of progress.

"It's a real shame more progress has not been made. With such a strong focus on Closing the Gap there should be significant improvements, but there's not. That's got to tell us that maybe we're going about it the wrong way," he said.

Mr Watson said he was pleased the Federal Government was focusing on improving education and employment but more investment needed to be made in Indigenous enterprises that were educating communities and providing jobs in remote areas.

"In the Kimberley, we are creating our own jobs through developing enterprises that support our cultural values, have strong regional governance and generate a sustainable income," he said.

"The Kimberley Ranger Network employs more than 80 full-time men and women to work in the conservation and land management sector. We are building up the Indigenous pastoral industry and developing tourism ventures. These are real jobs that require tangible qualifications and provide a long-term career pathway.

"Remote employment is proven to be successful and is producing long-term social benefits including improved health and wellbeing, social cohesion, cultural strength, empowerment and leadership, economic independence and increased education.

"There is a big push for our people to enter into the mining industry and although many people are forging a successful career in this industry, the impacts associated with FIFO work, irrelevant of race, have been well-documented.

"We don't want to add to our social problems but create solutions to solve them."

Mr Watson said he expected the cost benefits of investing in remote employment and education compared to supporting people in jail or on welfare to be significant.

"Think of the savings you would see if more people were employed and there were less Aboriginal people in jail, on welfare and in need of social services. Investing in Indigenous jobs and subsidising Indigenous enterprises has to be cheaper than paying to support disadvantaged and struggling communities," he said.

"It is also far more beneficial to the nation, to Indigenous people and to the social fabric of our society if people are educated and employed and the gap in Indigenous disadvantage is closed."