



MEDIA STATEMENT

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Kimberley Leaders urge Government to Act Now to Protect the Martuwarra Fitzroy River

Leaders from across the Kimberley have urged the McGowan Government to prioritise the protection of the Fitzroy River following disturbing findings outlined in the State of Environment Report this week.

Federal Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek released the 2021 State of Environment report on Monday which detailed the poor and deteriorating health of Australia's natural environment over the past five years.

Key findings from the report revealed that Indigenous knowledge and connections to Country are vital for sustainability and healing Australia. The report also warned that the greatest threat facing rivers was the extraction of surface and ground water.

At a meeting of the Kimberley Land Council's Board of Directors, on the banks of the Fitzroy River, CEO Tyrone Garstone said the findings reaffirmed the need for urgent action to protect the ecologically and culturally unique Martuwarra and Kimberley region.

"The McGowan Government must take notice of the findings from the report and listen to the Traditional Owners of the Martuwarra Fitzroy River," Mr Garstone said.

"Traditional Owners do not consent to the large-scale extraction of water from the national heritage listed river. Kimberley leaders are calling on the Government to abandon plans which would see 300 billion litres of surface water extracted from the river."

"The report overwhelmingly recommends the use of Indigenous knowledge. We are urging the Government to listen to the ancient knowledge of Traditional Owners, protect country and protect Aboriginal Heritage," Mr Garstone said.

The report also found that respectful use of Indigenous knowledge, recognition of Indigenous rights, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge systems working together will lead to positive change.

KLC Land and Sea Unit Manager Daniel Oades said valuing and supporting Indigenous ranger and Indigenous land and sea management is vital to improving Australia's environmental outlook now and into the future.

"The State of the Environment Report finally recognises the devastating impacts ignoring recommendations of Traditional Owners and undervaluing our natural places has had on Australia's environment," Mr Oades said.

"Australia can no longer ignore the warning signs. This report reinforces the need for sustainable long-term funding for Indigenous rangers from both State and Federal Governments."

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