

# Kimberley Land Council



## MEDIA STATEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

24<sup>th</sup> November 2022

### **“A National Standard is Vital for the Future Protection of our Heritage”: KLC Welcomes New Heritage Protections**

The Kimberley Land Council has welcomed the Commonwealth Government’s announcement to legislate new heritage protections in response to the Juukan Gorge Inquiry.

Today the federal government announced it will legislate new protections for Indigenous heritage sites following Rio Tinto’s destruction of a sacred rock shelter at Juukan Gorge last year.

The government has accepted all but one recommendation from last year’s inquiry, including to legislate new cultural heritage protections and review the native title act.

KLC CEO Tyronne Garstone said a national standard is vital to the future protection of Aboriginal heritage.

“This is an integral step towards truth-telling. This is the nation acknowledging it is sacrilege to destroy our heritage.”

“The destruction that occurred at Juukan Gorge was not an isolated incident. Here in the Kimberley, we have had countless sites desecrated and destroyed with those responsible often facing no consequences.”

Mr Garstone said it is important that the Commonwealth legislation delivers real change and gives choice and decision-making to Traditional Owners.

“The response signals there will be an improvement to cultural heritage protection across the country. It will ensure there is a minimum standard that can be consistently applied throughout Australia.”

“We have grave concerns regarding Western Australia’s Aboriginal cultural heritage legislation introduced last year. WA’s weak heritage protection laws would not prevent another incident like Juukan Gorge. The sooner the Commonwealth protections can be implemented, the better. We will be calling for the Commonwealth to intervene.”

KLC Chairman Anthony Watson represented the Land Council in Canberra for the signing of the First Nations Heritage Protection Alliance Partnership this morning with Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek, Minister for Indigenous Affairs Linda Burney and Senator Patrick Dodson.

The partnership will be key to guiding the reform process, with the government committing to the principles of free prior and informed consent, truth telling, open dialogue and genuine consultation.

Mr Garstone acknowledges the role the First Nations Heritage Protection Alliance will play in the Commonwealth Government’s commitment to strengthening Commonwealth laws in relation to heritage.

“Indigenous voices and decision-making will be critical to this legislation being developed in the right way. There will be a higher law that can protect Aboriginal culture and heritage, and this will benefit those states and jurisdictions that have inadequate protection.”

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