



MEDIA RELEASE

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Global Indigenous gathering: conserving nature and culture

More than 300 Indigenous people from five continents have descended on the Blue Mountains today to share knowledge about conserving nature and culture.

The Gathering in the Gully event brings together Indigenous people from 43 countries including Canada, the Philippines, Iran, Senegal, Bolivia, Taiwan, Madagascar and Australia and will be supported by the Traditional Owners of The Gully Aboriginal Place, in the heart of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.

The gathering is being held in Katoomba from November 10-11 as a pre-cursor to the World Parks Congress in Sydney. The Gully is a declared Aboriginal place that is managed between the Blue Mountains City Council and The Gully Traditional Owners.

Dr. Grazia Borrini-Feyerabend, Global Coordinator of the ICCA Consortium Association – an event partner – said Indigenous peoples and local communities, in developing large scale protected areas, conserved territories and community areas were playing a critical role in ensuring the protection of biodiversity and cultural values while developing socio-economic ventures.

Through forming strong partnerships with international organisations, the conservation initiatives of Indigenous peoples and communities is gaining worldwide recognition and attention particularly through the development of global agreements such as the Convention on Biological Diversity.

“Indigenous peoples and local communities continue to play an invaluable role in conserving nature. This gathering is about bringing people together to connect, share experiences and learn from one another,” Dr. Borrini-Feyerabend said.

“We all have a strong bond with our traditional lands for there is culture in nature and nature in culture. We want to keep our land and sea country alive and thriving; resilient to the changes in climate and the global economy.”

The Gathering in the Gully activities include field trips and exchanges with Blue Mountains Traditional Owners, a dialogue day showcasing community conservation initiatives from five continents and group discussions about the kind of official recognition and support that such initiatives receive.

A traditional dance and corroboree will be held tonight with all cultures invited to participate. The Gathering provides the opportunity to network and create solidarity among representatives of Indigenous peoples and communities ahead of their participation in the World Parks Congress.

“Discussions will focus on community struggles to conserve nature and culture, how people have endured against the odds, what strategic approaches have worked in communities with and without collective land tenure and what collective rights and responsibilities are needed so that communities and nature can affectively mitigate and respond to environmental threats.” Dr. Borrini-Feyerabend said.

“This is going to be a celebration of cultural diversity, mutual learning and support. Each of our cultures is unique but we share the same aspirations to improve the lives of our people while conserving nature and culture for everyone.”

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Media background:

Event inspiration

The inspiration for this international Indigenous gathering was triggered by the World Parks Congress which will be held in Sydney from November 12-19. The event occurs only every 10 years and provides a global platform for discussion about protected areas and sets the conservation agenda for the next decade. The Gathering in the Gully event provides an opportunity for Indigenous people from across the world to share experiences and stories and to form strong networks and connections in an intimate setting before the World Parks Congress.

People, countries and continents

There will be Indigenous peoples and local communities from 43 countries and five continents attending the Gathering in the Gully event. Each group has a unique culture and an inspiring story to tell. Some of the participants include:

- ☐ Local fisherman from Casamance, Senegal who are representing eight villages that joined together to create their own marine Conserved Heritage area in an estuary. In doing so, they restored the biodiversity of the area; the number of dolphins, crocodiles, fish and birds that increased and they quadrupled their fish catch by going back to their ancestor's rule of respecting “no-go” areas. They also developed zones where only local villagers can fish, the catch is sold locally and the price is decided by the people so that everyone can afford to eat “the good fish”.
- ☐ The Mapuche people from the highlands of Patagonia, Argentina are working to implement their self-defined “Life Plans” that provide a unique way to live their life and conserve the environment without engaging in a mining economy based on fracking. They live within a protected area and area resisting government moves to use their traditional lands for economic development.
- ☐ Mobile Indigenous peoples from Iran are re-creating their traditional institutions, restoring their migration territories and taking action in solidarity to develop economic initiatives that benefit both nature and communities. The Abholassani tribe has obtained powerful positive results when faced with the desperate need to cope with climate change evidenced in very severe and repeated droughts. In Iran there are 100 tribal confederations and 600

independent tribes with 200,000 families engaged in regular migration, all working together to organise get their conservation efforts recognised.

- In the Kimberley, Aboriginal people have declared eight Indigenous Protected Areas across 90,000 sq km of their country - an area the size of Tasmania. From the coastal waters of the Dampier Peninsula to the vast landscape of the Great Sandy Desert, Kimberley Aboriginal people are using IPAs to protect biodiversity values, enhance culture, develop environmental enterprises and improve socio-economic conditions. Indigenous elders work with rangers to implement IPA management plans and pass on traditional knowledge, practices and cultural stories while ensuring the unique values of the Kimberley can be enjoyed by future generations.
- In New South Wales, Aboriginal people and the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service have 26 arrangements to jointly manage 1.65 million hectares or about 25% of national parks. The NSW Joint Management Custodians and representatives from NSW Aboriginal communities will attend the gathering and share their experiences in managing their country, sustaining and sharing their culture and in developing social and economic outcomes such as employment, training and business development. Representatives will come from Goodooga in the far North West to Narooma on the far south coast of NSW.
- Indigenous people from across Australia will be attending the gathering to share their experiences managing World Heritage Areas. The Australian World Heritage Indigenous Network includes Aboriginal people with connections to Tasmanian Wilderness, Greater Blue Mountains, Willandra Lakes Region, Ningaloo coast, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, Gondwana Rainforests, Wet Tropics of Queensland, Australian Fossil Mammal Sites (Riversleigh), Fraser Island, Purnululu, Shark Bay, Kakadu and Uluru - Kata Tjuta.