



KIMBERLEY LAND COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2023



KLC Chair Anthony Watson, Yanunijarra
Aboriginal Corporation CEO Peter Murray,
KRED CEO Damien Parriman



MABU NGIMBI,

**Ngarda gooli
wardkum marulu
wardkum ngayi**

We cannot be upset. Our work is special.

**THROUGH ANOTHER CHALLENGING YEAR,
THE RESILIENCE AND STRENGTH OF OUR
PEOPLE CONTINUES TO INSPIRE ME.**

The recent Referendum outcome was the result no one had hoped for. Our Kimberley communities were still lining up to cast our votes when analysts called the no result. It was called within just 90-minutes of booths closing on the east coast.

Despite the sadness, I am so proud of the role the KLC played throughout the referendum. Our organisation prioritised advocating for our people and taking information about the referendum to major towns and communities through our roadshow, and relentless media campaigning.

I am proud to know that in the Kimberley, 75 per cent of people in remote communities said yes to a Voice and constitutional recognition. Of the entire region, 54 per cent of people voted yes.

I would like to commend the work of KLC CEO Tyrone Garstone and his contributions throughout the campaign and on the Referendum Working Group. His time on the campaign has meant endless engagements, media interviews and public appearances.

The contributions from community leaders must also be acknowledged. We saw Jane Biendurry bravely share her story to call on Australia to vote yes at Noel Pearson's National Press Club Address in Canberra. Our elders, young people, and rangers spoke out in videos shared to hundreds of thousands of people on social media. To everyone who supported the yes campaign, thank you.



KLC Chair Anthony Watson with KLC Cultural Advisor Irene Davey

We saw the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities coming together throughout the campaign, walking hand in hand to a better future for Australia. To the people that walked alongside us, thank you. You must keep walking beside us now, more than ever.

For the longest time, we have called for a regional body to speak strong, with one voice. The KLC will continue to work to progress the Kimberley Aboriginal Regional Body (KARB), which has been running consultations throughout the Kimberley the past few months.

KARB will be a governance structure that will achieve a regional voice, providing a mechanism for local Kimberley people to be heard by governments. It will respect the principles of place-based decision-making and has the backing of other key Kimberley organisations; KLC, Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre (KALACC), Kimberley Language Resource Centre (KLRC), Empowered Young Leaders (EYL), Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services (KAMS), West Kimberley Futures Empowered Communities, Binarri-Binja Yarrowoo and Aarnja.

SUCCESSFUL 2023 AGMS

In September we had the AGMs of the KLC, KLRC, Aarnja, KALACC and Empowered Young Leaders at Home Valley Station. I would like to thank Balanggarra for hosting us. Once again the AGMs were successful, and there were plenty

of productive discussions whilst reporting back to members. At the AGM we delivered the Home Valley Statement to Minister Linda Burney, highlighting our support for constitutional recognition and an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice. We have chosen to publish this statement in this newsletter so we can remember what our leaders called for, and to remember why we need better representation in Parliament. The journey is far from over.

This year was the first AGM for Empowered Young Leaders. I am so proud to see the next generation actively involved in regional decision-making. I encourage our members to work to get more young people involved. They will be the future leaders for the Kimberley, and I hope next year we will see more attendance from the next generation.

MARTUWARRA FITZROY RIVER

I was pleased to join over 80 Traditional Owners who gathered in Fitzroy Crossing to discuss the future of the Martuwarra Fitzroy River at an event hosted by the Kimberley Land Council and the Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council at the start of November.

Native title has been determined along the length of the Martuwarra and across the entire catchment area. The river and its tributaries have sustained Kimberley Aboriginal people for thousands of years and are central to spirituality, identity and cultural practices.

We have fought for many years for rights to land and sea and as native title holders, it is important that the WA

Government is now recognising Traditional Owners' legal and traditional rights in managing the land and its waterways.

We welcome the commitment by the WA Government that there will be no further surface water licensed from the Fitzroy River catchment and no damming of the river. But we need more time, science and advice to work through the government's policy positions before any decisions can be made.

These commitments are a step in the right direction, and must be followed by real, genuine and ongoing engagement with Traditional Owners.

RETIREMENT OF SENATOR DODSON

After a lifetime of advocacy for our people, Yawuru man and former KLC Director Senator Patrick Dodson has announced his retirement from federal politics.

Senator Dodson has consistently stood up for our rights, justice and reconciliation. This includes serving as CEO and Director of both the Kimberley Land Council and the Central Land Council, as the first Chair of Reconciliation Australia, Commissioner on the Royal Commission into Indigenous Deaths in Custody, Lead Negotiator for the Miriuwung Gajerrong Ord Global Agreements, Chairperson for Nyamba Buru Yawuru and nine years in federal parliament as Senator for Western Australia.

Most recently Senator Dodson was appointed as the government's special envoy for reconciliation and the implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

He leaves behind a legacy of one of the most influential Aboriginal leaders of his generation.

I am proud to have worked alongside Senator Dodson over his long career of advocacy for our people, land rights and culture. We thank him for his many contributions which have paved the way for the next generation. We wish him all the best in his retirement.

RELEASE OF THE KIMBERLEY WOMEN'S RANGER STRATEGY

I would like to congratulate all who contributed to the development of the new Women's Ranger Strategy. This strategy is the product of collaboration between women across the Kimberley, and many people have invested significant time and knowledge into its creation. The role of women rangers is critical to the protection of Country, and the KLC looks forward to continuing to support the Kimberley Women's Ranger Network.



KLC Chair Anthony Watson and Senator Patrick Dodson.



KLC Chair Anthony Watson and KLC Founder, John Watson.

ACKNOWLEDGING ELDERS PASSED

It brings me great sadness to know this year, again, we have lost many significant Kimberley leaders. We remember their contributions, their guidance and their teachings. Most recently, we mourned the passing of strong cultural man, Mr Brown.

Mr Brown provided his voice for important issues, such as the protection of the Martuwarra Fitzroy River from the ripple effects of industry, as well as the recent journey towards recognition in the constitution, and he continued to be a daily presence in the KALACC office in Fitzroy Crossing.

This is a significant loss for the entire Kimberley region, but particularly the Fitzroy Valley which has encountered great challenges throughout the past year.

There was also the sad news from the Northern Land Council that their Chairperson, Dr Bush-Blanasi, passed away in November. Dr Bush-Blanasi was an outstanding leader and a champion of Indigenous rights.

My condolences go out to all communities and family members who have lost someone this year.

THANK YOU

Thank you to the KLC's members, Representative Council, Board of Directors, Cultural Advisors and staff. This year the KLC is pleased to have seen the advantages of the new governance structure introduced in 2022. It has helped to streamline strategic planning and our operations for the region.

Finally, thank you to everyone for your contributions throughout another big year. The KLC regularly experiences high levels of scrutiny. I am proud that every review conducted continues to show the transparency and integrity of the organisation. Members are able to access the findings of these reviews on the ORIC website.

I know there has been much heartbreak and disappointment in 2023, but our people are resilient and strong, and through the integrity of the KLC, we will continue the work of our elders and all those who came before us.

Anthony Watson
Chairperson, Kimberley Land Council

TRADITIONAL OWNERS UNITE TO PROTECT THE MARTUWARRA FITZROY RIVER

MORE THAN 80 TRADITIONAL OWNERS FROM 10 TRADITIONAL OWNER GROUPS ACROSS THE KIMBERLEY GATHERED IN FITZROY CROSSING TO DISCUSS THE FUTURE OF THE MARTUWARRA FITZROY RIVER.

The three-day event was hosted by the Kimberley Land Council and the Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council at Fitzroy River Lodge from the 31st October – 2nd November.



Native title has been determined along the length of the Martuwarra and across the entire catchment area. The river and its tributaries have sustained Kimberley Aboriginal people for thousands of years and are central to spirituality, identity and cultural practices.

Kimberley Land Council Chair Anthony Watson thanked the Minister for Water Simone McGurk for attending the Martuwarra Fitzroy River Forum, and her commitment to listening and engaging with Traditional Owners across the catchment.

“We look forward to working side by side with the Minister to achieve a path forward that ensures the river can be sustained for generations into the future,” Mr Watson said.

“We have fought for many years for rights to land and as native title holders, and it is important that the WA Government is now recognising Traditional Owners’ legal and traditional rights in managing the land and its waterways.”

The forum followed the release of the WA Government’s Water Allocation Planning in the Fitzroy Policy Position Paper, confirming its promise to protect the Fitzroy River and announcing 10 key policy positions.

“We welcome the commitment by the WA Government that there will be no further surface water licensed from the Fitzroy River catchment and no damming of the river,” Mr Watson said. “But we need more time, science and advice to work through the government’s policy positions before any decisions can be made.”



“These commitments are a step in the right direction, and must be followed by real, genuine and ongoing engagement with Traditional Owners.”

Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council Chair Professor Anne Poelina explained the science behind the multiple risks from development to the Minister at the event.

“Traditional Owners support the government’s decision to release the scientific study documents, to provide greater transparency into the scientific foundation of the policy paper. Informed decision making must be made on best available climate and water science, before finalising the allocation plan,” Prof. Poelina said.

Mr Watson said there was a clear message to the Minister that collective decision-making by Traditional Owner groups would be integral to any future water planning in the Fitzroy.

“The Martuwarra is one living system. What happens in one part of the river, affects the whole river and therefore all Traditional Owner voices must be considered.”

Anthony Watson, KLC Chairperson



2023 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETINGS



KIMBERLEY
LAND COUNCIL



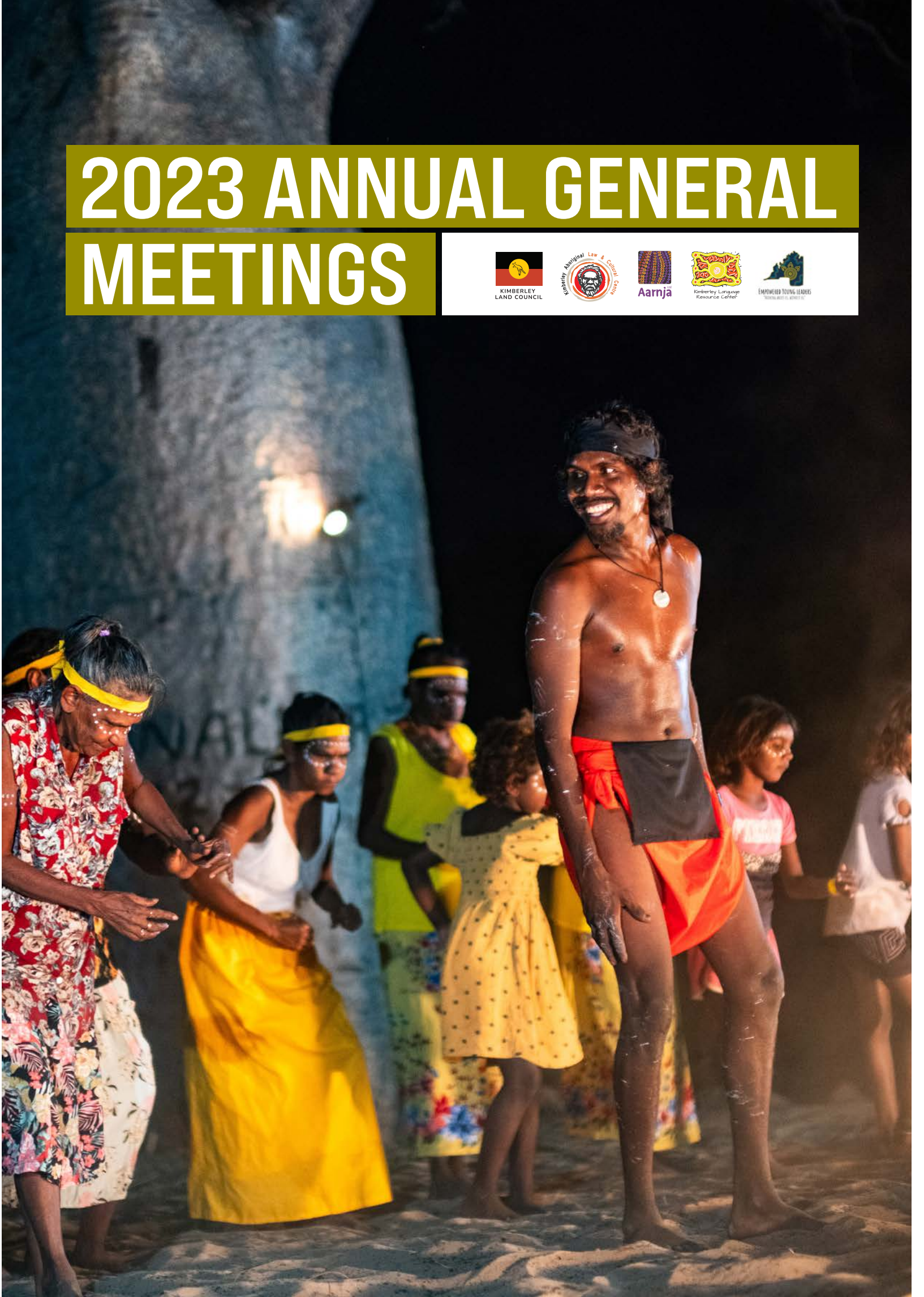
Aarnja



Kimberley Language
Resource Centre



EMPOWERED YOUNG LEADERS
"Working with us, working for us"





OVER 400 KIMBERLEY ABORIGINAL PEOPLE MET AT HOME VALLEY STATION FOR THE AGMS OF THE KIMBERLEY LAND COUNCIL, AARNJA, KIMBERLEY ABORIGINAL LAW AND CULTURE CENTRE, KIMBERLEY LANGUAGE RESOURCE CENTRE AND EMPOWERED YOUNG LEADERS IN SEPTEMBER.





A VOICE FOR CHANGE - THE HOME VALLEY STATEMENT

The five representative organisations of the Kimberley released a statement, pledging their full support for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Voice. Whilst the Referendum was not the outcome that we had hoped for, the KLC has chosen to publish it in the newsletter for historical purposes. The sentiment remains and the peak bodies of the Kimberley will continue to advocate for a better future for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



WE, THE MEMBERS OF THE FIVE REPRESENTATIVE ORGANISATIONS OF THE KIMBERLEY PLEDGE OUR FULL SUPPORT TO AN ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER VOICE IN THE CONSTITUTION AND THE ULURU STATEMENT FROM THE HEART IN FULL.

As leaders from across the country gathered at Uluru in 2017, inviting the Australian people to make simple but significant change, we issue this karn-karn, asking for constitutional recognition, and a healing of our nation.

We make this statement in acknowledgment of our Elders, the giants on whose shoulders we stand, and the for the next generation, the young people whose futures are in Australia's hands.

At Noonkanbah in 1978, our leaders took an important first step in the history of reconciliation in Australia, fighting for land rights.

At Crocodile Hole in 1991, we called for regional representation, a voice and a seat at the table.

At Broome in 2017, Kimberley people resolved that meaningful and practical recognition was the only way forward.

And today, at Home Valley Station, we urge you, the Australian people, to vote 'yes' in the forthcoming referendum.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart, grown and shaped by Indigenous people as the conversation travelled across the nation, asks Australians to listen, to create a new path forward and a better Australia for all.

Not a path designed by bureaucrats or politicians, or vulnerable to the electoral cycle, but a path shaped by the lived experience of Indigenous people across the nation.

We, are the people who have been forced to work within a system that has failed us generation after generation. Now we ask for the opportunity to speak truth to that system so that we can take control of our lives.

Is our nation prepared to persevere with the same approach that has failed our people for generations?

Will we allow the first people of Australia to continue having laws made about them without their input?

Australians see the gap – the incarceration rates and education outcomes, the life expectancy and poor health, and they overwhelmingly want practical and effective action – a voice direct from the people, improving lives in communities on the ground.

We have a once in a generation opportunity before us.

To vote yes is to stand beside us, to give our people the seat at the table, a voice that can affect real and long-lasting change.

ABORIGINAL HERITAGE ACT UPDATE

UPDATED ABORIGINAL HERITAGE ACT COMMENCES

Last month, Western Australia reverted to a more than 50-year-old law, the Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972. This Act is once again the law in Western Australia that deals with the protection of Aboriginal cultural heritage.

The Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2021, which only began operating in full in July this year, has been repealed and is no longer the law. The KLC's special update from September 2023 provides more information about the WA Government's decision to repeal the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2021 and bring back the Aboriginal Heritage Act.

Although the Aboriginal Heritage Act has been amended, it is unclear how positive the changes will be for Traditional Owners and cultural heritage protection.

It is clear that the amendments to the Aboriginal Heritage Act do not go far enough and do not meet the recommendations in *A Way Forward*, the Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia's final report into the destruction of the Juukan Gorge caves in the Pilbara.



Purnululu National Park

THE KEY CHANGES ARE EXPLAINED BELOW:

Native title parties (such as PBCs) will have the same right to apply for a review of section 18 decisions that proponents have.

A section 18 permit is a permission from the Minister to do something that will impact, damage or destroy Aboriginal cultural heritage. Previously, a proponent (e.g. a mining or exploration company) had a right apply for a review of the Minister's decision to approve or deny a section 18 permit. The changes to the law mean that native title parties now also have the right to apply for a review, in addition to proponents. This means that if a native title party does not agree with the Minister's decision to grant a section 18 permit, the native title party can ask the State Administrative Tribunal to review the Minister's decision.

The Premier will have a new power to 'call in' any appeal to the State Administrative Tribunal.

This power enables the Premier to decide a section 18 appeal where the matter raises 'issues of State or regional importance'. Where the 'call in' power is used, the Premier will make the decision instead of the State Administrative Tribunal. It is not clear if and when the Premier will use the 'call in' power to override the State Administrative Tribunal's role in deciding section 18 appeals. However, history tells us that the WA Government and its officials are overwhelmingly more likely to make section 18 decisions in favour of proponents. Therefore, the KLC is concerned that the Premier is most likely to use the 'call in' power to approve section 18 permits and allow proponent projects to go ahead.

Section 18 permit holders must report any new information about an Aboriginal site to the Minister.

'Gag orders' constraining Traditional Owners are banned.



Martuwarra Fitzroy River

This means any agreements that require Traditional Owners to give up their rights to appeal or comment will be illegal.

The Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Council and the Aboriginal Cultural Material Committee are replaced by the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Committee under the Aboriginal Heritage Act.

This committee currently has a majority of Aboriginal members. As far as practicable, it is a requirement that the majority of the members are persons of Aboriginal descent.

Section 18 permits can now be changed by the Minister if there is a change in ownership of the land.

The owner of the land must tell the Minister if there is a change of ownership, and the Minister can change any of the conditions of the section 18 permit.

CAPACITY-BUILDING SUPPORT FOR PBCS

The WA Government has said it will provide capacity-building support to PBCs, registered native title claimants and native title representative bodies (such as the KLC) to support them to engage with proponents on cultural heritage issues.

The WA Government has said that PBCs will be able to apply for funding through the capacity-building program. The KLC has told the WA Government it wants to be closely involved in designing the program to make sure it meets the needs of PBCs.



KLC Chair Anthony Watson outside Parliament House in Canberra for the signing of the partnership agreement between the Australian Government and First Nations Heritage Protection Alliance in November, 2022.

NATIONAL HERITAGE LAW REFORM

IT HAS BEEN 12 MONTHS SINCE THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED IT WOULD CREATE NEW STANDALONE LEGISLATION FOR ABORIGINAL CULTURAL HERITAGE AT A NATIONAL LEVEL.

The new laws are being negotiated with the government by the First Nations Heritage Protection Alliance, which includes membership from a broad range of land councils, Prescribed Bodies Corporate and other Traditional Owner corporations.

The KLC has been a part of the Alliance, but now has significant concerns that changes being negotiated do not go far enough.

The KLC, together with the Northern Land Council and the Cape York Land Council, have written to the Minister in charge, Tanya Plibersek, to state our significant concerns, and warn that we will pull out of the Alliance if the government remains unwilling to develop a new Commonwealth heritage protection law that significantly improves on the current ATSIHP Act.

The lack of commitment to a new law is disappointing given the promises made to Traditional Owners following the destruction of Juukan Gorge and the recommendations outlined in the final report, *A Way Forward*.

A strong and consistent national law that protects Aboriginal cultural heritage is also particularly important in Western Australia following the return of the outdated and ineffective Aboriginal Heritage Act. More details about state heritage laws can be found on page 12 of this newsletter.



SUPPORTING KIMBERLEY PBCS

THE KLC'S NATIVE TITLE TEAM HAS SUPPORTED THE DELIVERY OF **42 MEETINGS** FOR PRESCRIBED BODIES CORPORATE (PBCs) OVER THE PAST THREE MONTHS.

These meetings ranging from AGMs to directors' meetings, community consultations, meetings for preservation evidence, future act work and pre-claim field work were held across the Kimberley and supported by a team of just eight native title project officers and field staff.

The KLC is proud to continue to support and work alongside PBCs throughout the Kimberley.



Giniyawarni Yoowaniya Riwi AGM held on the riverbank at Fossil Downs Station



Fieldwork for claim research over the Bells Point Weedong area on the Dampier Peninsula.

KLC ATTENDS THE NATIONAL SEA COUNTRY ALLIANCE SUMMIT

KLC CEO TYRONNE GARSTONE AND CHAIRPERSON ANTHONY WATSON ATTENDED THE NATIONAL SEA COUNTRY ALLIANCE SUMMIT ON LARRAKIA COUNTRY (DARWIN) ON THE 6 & 7 OF NOVEMBER.

They were joined by more than 100 First Nations people at the two-day summit where Traditional Owner groups with responsibility for sea-country – particularly country that intersects with proposed offshore oil and gas projects – discussed their rights and responsibilities in the face of increased offshore energy proposals.

The summit, organised by the National Native Title Council (NNTC) included sessions on how Traditional Owners could benefit from resources extraction, what best-practice consultation would look like, tangible and intangible cultural heritage interests, future frameworks, speaking for country and ensuring Indigenous governance structures are respected with proponents.

This summit was initiated after the court win (The Santos NA Barossa Pty Ltd v Tjalippa (2022 FCAFC 193) against Santos’s \$5b Barossa offshore fast project.



CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF INDIGENOUS PROTECTED AREAS

KLC CHAIR ANTHONY WATSON TRAVELLED TO PARLIAMENT HOUSE IN CANBERRA ALONGSIDE RANGERS FROM AROUND AUSTRALIA TO CELEBRATE 25 YEARS OF IPAS.

At the celebration hosted by Country Needs People in November, the Minister for Indigenous Australians Linda Burney announced \$160.5 million to support existing IPA projects. This is on top of a Commonwealth commitment to establish 10 new areas.

There are currently 84 Indigenous Protected Areas in Australia, covering over 94 million hectares of land and sea Country, which now contribute to over 50 per cent of Australia’s reserves on lands.

Currently, there are nine IPAs in the Kimberley. Four of these link together to create the largest Indigenous-owned conservation corridor in northern Australia.



RANGERS BATTLE LATE SEASON FIRES

THE KIMBERLEY REGION HAS EXPERIENCED SEVERE END OF YEAR LATE SEASON FIRES.



Fire in the Great Sandy Desert.

This fire season was expected following two years of wet seasons with above average rainfall. Wet weather encourages vegetation growth which increases the amount of fuel available to burn.

Despite the challenging conditions, Kimberley ranger teams have been working hard to mitigate the fires collaborating with other ranger teams, the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) and other partners to protect communities. Prescribed burning work done by rangers earlier in the year has helped to significantly reduce the impact of these fires.

The largest fire is in the Great Sandy Desert. One ignition tracked by NAFI (North Australian Fire Information) was shown to have travelled over 600kms from south of Halls Creek over to the coast south of Broome.

The success of the KLC's fire program and the hard work of ranger teams throughout the Kimberley over the years can be seen through this year's fire behaviour. Older burns, put in by the ranger teams in the areas from prescribed burning activities three to four years ago successfully pulled up the fires. This is the first time there has been enough structure in the desert to support an on-ground response from the ranger teams. This points to the need for large landscape-scale burning to expand over the coming years to create a desert fuel mosaic that will prevent large fire events in the future.

KLC Fire Program Manager Andrew Morton fights a late season fire alongside the Karajarri Rangers.



RANGERS COMPLETE MARITIME TRAINING

THE BARDI JAWI AND NYUL NYUL RANGER GROUPS HAVE SUCCESSFULLY FINISHED A THREE-YEAR PERIOD OF MARITIME TRAINING TOWARDS COXSWAIN GRADE 1 AND 2 CERTIFICATES.

Over 20 rangers from the Bardi Jawi and Nyul Nyul ranger teams took part in the training alongside five Ardyaloon community members.

Coxswain qualifications will allow the rangers to skipper a commercial boat up to 12 metres in length, improving the maritime knowledge and capacity of both groups. They are also a great way to enter the maritime industry and take on a new career driving patrol vessels for the new jointly managed marine park and also on tourism boats.

All the students completed the training for Coxswain Grade 2 and 10 rangers will continue their studies towards the higher level Coxswain Grade 1.

In November, the first three rangers from the program completed all necessary tasks to lodge for their Grade 1 Coxswain certificate. Congratulations to Bardi Jawi Oorany rangers Tamara Moore and Natasha George and Bardi Jawi Aamba Ranger Rodney Maher Junior on this achievement.

The training program included classroom learning, practical tasks and additional literacy, language and numeracy support to see all rangers reach successful training outcomes.

All training was delivered by North Regional TAFE and supported by KLC Ranger Training Coordinator Hylke Vader.





WOMEN RANGERS ACHIEVE MARINE MILESTONE

TAMARA MOORE AND NATASHA GEORGE FROM THE BARDI JAWI OORANY RANGERS HAVE BECOME THE FIRST WOMEN RANGERS IN THE KIMBERLEY TO COMPLETE THEIR COXSWAIN GRADE 1 QUALIFICATIONS.

This is a significant achievement which highlights the increasing capacity and skillset of Indigenous rangers across land and sea management.



KIMBERLEY INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S RANGER STRATEGY RELEASED



The strategy, which seeks to expand and protect the women's ranger network in the Kimberley, was drafted by more than 50 women rangers, elders and community members over three years from 2021 – 2023.

Women rangers were first employed in the Kimberley in 2010. The program has been incredibly successful, and over the past decade the numbers of women rangers and teams have steadily increased.

The KLC appointed a Women's Ranger Development Coordinator in 2018 to support the work, training and skills development of women rangers as well as expansion of the program.

The strategy was guided by and aligns with the strategic plans of the KLC, KALACC Kimberley Aboriginal Women, the Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices) report and the Healthy Country Plans of the ranger teams.

KLC Deputy CEO Sarah Parriman said the development of the plan was a significant milestone for Kimberley land and sea management.

"This strategy is the product of many years of collaboration from women and organisations across the Kimberley. Congratulations to all who were involved."

THE KIMBERLEY LAND COUNCIL IS PROUD TO ANNOUNCE THE RELEASE OF THE FIRST KIMBERLEY INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S RANGER STRATEGY.



The KLC would also like to acknowledge the significant contributions to the strategy, and to the Women's Ranger Network, from a dedicated leader and woman ranger, who sadly passed this year.

"The KLC has been dedicated to supporting the development of the Kimberley Indigenous Women's Ranger Strategy, and we look forward to supporting the implementation of the strategy and to see our women rangers take ownership over how they work collectively to grow and strengthen, not only the land management outcomes but their contributions to the wellbeing of their communities, families and lives."

KLC Deputy CEO, Sarah Parriman



2023 SALTWATER COUNTRY MANAGEMENT FORUM

THE KIMBERLEY INDIGENOUS SALTWATER ADVISORY GROUP (ISWAG) HELD THEIR ANNUAL 2023 SALTWATER COUNTRY MANAGEMENT FORUM IN BROOME AT THE START OF NOVEMBER.

Over 80 ISWAG members and marine scientists attended the three-day forum held at Broome Surf Lifesaving Club with the aim of sharing knowledge and increasing the capacity to manage, protect and work on Kimberley sea country.

The meetings are an important opportunity for members to share findings and observations from ongoing sea country research work. Representatives from Australian Marine Parks also discussed strategies for improving governance, shared funding opportunities and pathways to becoming qualified marine scientists.

The membership updated the ISWAG Strategic Plan and discussed future directions for the advisory group.

ISWAG is proud to recognise the enduring connection between Traditional Owners and their sea Country. The group acknowledges the inherent responsibility and role that the ecological cultural knowledge of Australia's first scientists play in the sustainability of our oceans.



AS PART OF THE THREE-DAY AGENDA:

Australian Marine Parks shared opportunities for extended funding support to ISWAG. There was also the opportunity to discuss further funding for the Kimberley Turtle and Dugong Initiative work through the recent Australian Marine Parks grant round.

Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) presented on recent Kimberley research and discussed a proposed funding deed to undertake activities in line with ISWAG's priorities such as customary fishing and capacity building for rangers.

ISWAG members workshopped a Dugong Genetics Project and how a NESP funded drone survey could be implemented on Country in 2024 with James Cook University (JCU) and Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) staff.

The Indigenous Land and Sea Council (ILSC) discussed support to strengthen the governance model of ISWAG.

EAST KIMBERLEY ANIMAL TRAPPING SURVEYS

The Kija and Gooniyandi Ranger teams travelled to Violet Valley in the east Kimberley to conduct animal trapping surveys with KLC ecologist Marlee Hutton in September.

The trip was part of a formal training course with North West Regional TAFE and contributed to the rangers certificates in conservation land management. The rangers learnt how to safely handle, release, identify and record different species of small mammals, insects and reptiles.

When surveying for small mammals the rangers learnt how to use both cage and Elliot traps to survey for small mammals. They also set up and monitored pit fall and funnel traps for reptiles and insects





PARUKU RANGERS WEED AND FERAL ANIMAL MANAGEMENT

THE PARUKU RANGERS HAVE SPENT THE PAST FEW MONTHS WORKING ON WEED AND FERAL ANIMAL MANAGEMENT AROUND MULAN.

In August, Paruku Rangers conducted assessments of the cane toad population around Lake Gregory.

Cane toads are an introduced species and have been present around the lake for a few years with the numbers steadily increasing. The rangers collaborated with DBCA experts to learn about cane toads and understand how the population is coping around the lake, which is high in salt.

To understand cane toad movements around Lake Gregory, the team went spot lighting to collect cane toads and release them with radio trackers attached.

The results were very promising and showed that the cane toads are barely moving. This indicates signs of poor health and improper climate for the invasive toads.

The rangers also learnt how to conduct goanna camera trapping surveys to monitor the impacts that the toads might have on the local lizard populations.

In October, the Paruku Rangers hosted a Weed and Feral Animal Management Planning Workshop at the Mulan Community Office.

The event was coordinated by the KLC and Environs Kimberley facilitated the workshop. Traditional Owners from Mulan community attended the meeting, along with representatives from John Pujajangka- Piyirn Catholic School, Mulan Aboriginal Corporation and the Paruku Rangers, led by Jamie Brown.

The workshop was productive and had some good outcomes that will be implemented into the new healthy country plan being developed by the PBC.



MAYALA ECOLOGICAL SURVEYS

THIS YEAR MAYALA PBC HAS BEEN CONDUCTING ECOLOGICAL SURVEYS AND HEALTH ASSESSMENTS OF SOME OF THEIR REMOTE ISLANDS LOCATED NORTH OF THE DAMPIER PENINSULA.

These islands are important areas of biodiversity for the Kimberley region as they are home to highly significant cultural sites and are safe havens for native plants and animals.

Mayala Rangers and Traditional Owners, with the support of the Bardi Jawi Ranger vessels and KLC ecologist Marlee Hutton, have visited the islands three times this year to deploy cameras, collect scats, collect eDNA, conduct vegetation surveys and island health assessments.

Results from these surveys will assist Mayala in deciding on what management actions to put in place to protect the islands.





MAYALA YOUNG PERSONS WORKSHOP

A focus for Mayala PBC this year has been to improve youth engagement. Last year, the Mayala Healthy Country Committee identified the lack of youth engagement as an issue affecting the success of Mayala operations and sustainability moving into the future.

In 2023, the Mayala Young Persons Network was established. Young Mayala people were invited to a workshop and an on-country trip to help inspire and drive the next generation of Mayala work. There are currently 40 members, but the group is continuing to grow.





KLC Chair Anthony Watson accompanied Mr Watson, to the awards night in Canberra at the start of November.

KLC FOUNDER JOHN WATSON WINS PRESTIGIOUS AWARD

CONGRATULATIONS TO KLC FOUNDER JOHN WATSON, WHO RECENTLY WON THE AUSTRALIAN ACADEMY OF TECHNOLOGICAL SCIENCES & ENGINEERING TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE INNOVATION AWARD.

In 1986, part of John Watson's finger was bitten off by a crocodile.

A Nykina Mangala man, Mr Watson turned to the bark of the Mudjala mangrove tree to seek pain relief. He chewed on a strip of bark and applied it as dressing to his wound as he had been taught by the old people.

After hearing this story, Professor Ronald Quinn AM from the Griffith Institute of Drug Discovery partnered with Mr Watson to find out the medicinal values of the bark. Together, they discovered the bark contained two classes of compound: one effective for inflammatory pain and the other mitigated sciatic nerve injury.

This 30-year partnership has led to the development of a pain relief gel based on the complex mixtures present with the bark paste.

There is hope this gel could be supplied to athletes at the 2032 Brisbane Olympics and heralds widespread application for Traditional Knowledge, while maintaining Aboriginal ownership.

EAST KIMBERLEY CLEAN ENERGY PROJECT

A PIONEERING FIRST-NATIONS LED CLEAN ENERGY, GREEN HYDROGEN AND GREEN AMMONIA EXPORT PROJECT.

The KLC is proud to have partnered with MG Corporation, Balangarra Aboriginal Corporation and Pollination to develop the East Kimberley Clean Energy Project.

All four organisations have developed an equity partnership, with each having a 25 per cent stake in the clean energy development.

The East Kimberley Clean Energy project will be the first 100 per cent green energy, hydrogen, and ammonia export project in Australia to date. It has been designed to utilise the existing infrastructure in the region, including electricity transmission lines, roads, airport and the Port of Wyndham.

The project will see a 2,000-hectare solar farm developed on MG Corporation freehold land near Kununurra. The resulting solar energy (approximately 1,000 megawatts) will be combined with water and hydro energy from the existing Ord Hydro Power Plant at Lake Argyle to produce green hydrogen.

The green hydrogen will be transported by pipeline to Balangarra Country in Wyndham where it will be converted to green ammonia. The green ammonia will be sold locally as a fertiliser for irrigated agriculture and exported to support the decarbonisation of food production and fertilisers.

The Aboriginal Clean Energy Partnership has created an opportunity for Traditional Owner groups to co-develop, co-decide and self-determine the project architecture appropriate for their Country and economic independence. The new model places Traditional Owners as shareholders, not just stakeholders.

This significantly de-risks and accelerates project delivery as heritage, native title, environmental, engineering and approvals are integrated in project development activities.



The partnership provides a model for infrastructure projects in Australia that will ensure Traditional Owners benefit from the scale and pace of the transition to renewable energy.

It is a partnership model that, until now, has not existed in Australia, but is required if we are to meet the energy transition targets in the timeframe Australia has committed to.

“In order for Australia to meet its international climate commitments a lot of the projects will have to happen on Indigenous land.

At the heart of the Aboriginal Clean Energy partnership is the opportunity for Traditional Owners to have equity in the company to ensure there are flow on benefits.

We can't continue the same processes that we have followed through the dirty energy revolution. These projects have delivered little to nothing to Traditional Owners. We are very proud to partner alongside MG Corporation, Balangarra and Pollination on the East Kimberley Clean Energy Partnership, because Australia needs something radically different”

KLC CEO, Tyrone Garstone

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KIMBERLEY LAND COUNCIL

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