



MEDIA STATEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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KLC to deliver a powerful message to Premier McGowan calling for a new era of relations with Aboriginal people

The Kimberley Land Council (KLC) has announced its leadership will deliver a message stick to Premier Mark McGowan on 19 August, calling for a new era of relations between the WA Government and the State's Aboriginal people.

KLC Chair Anthony Watson has invited West Australians of all backgrounds – both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal - to join him as he leads a walk to Parliament to deliver the message stick.

"It's a critical time to protect the world's oldest living continuous culture, and preserve the irreplaceable connection to the past. We're calling on people to walk with us in celebration of Aboriginal culture, and to demand the protection of heritage."

"The McGowan Government has a once in a lifetime opportunity to get the laws around the protection of Aboriginal Heritage right. As it stands, the draft Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Bill fails to take the crucial step in recognising Aboriginal people as the decision makers about their own cultural heritage," said Mr Watson.

"The land rights movement has brought us such a long way in giving Aboriginal people control over our past and future through Native Title. How can the final say over what happens to Aboriginal sites rest with the minister, especially when we have seen that result in the tragic destruction of Juukan Gorge?"

"The heart of the issue is that Traditional Owners must have the right to say 'no' and for that to mean 'no', even when it doesn't suit Industry interests."

Mr Watson called on the Government to begin a new era in the spirit of acknowledgement and cooperation.

"This is an opportunity for the Premier and his Ministers to turn a new page. This is not a conversation about stopping development, this is a conversation about protecting the world's oldest living continuous culture."

"Our ownership over our land must be respected and acknowledged. We must be brought into the room with Government and Industry when it comes to matters concerning our heritage."

Mr Watson said the proposed Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Bill will allow mining companies and land users to avoid engaging with Traditional Owners and come up with their own determination on whether areas contain culturally significant Aboriginal sites.

"The proposed legislation will not stop the ongoing destruction of Aboriginal cultural heritage. It will not prevent a repeat of what happened at Juukan Gorge or the Jawaren and Garnkiny sites in the East Kimberley," said Mr Watson.

THE DETAILS OF THE WALK ON PARLIAMENT

- Meet at 10.30am at Kings Park Botanic Garden, 19 August for walk to the steps of WA Parliament where the letter and shield will be delivered at 1.30pm.
- Traditional Owners from the Kimberley will be traveling down to join the march and dance at Parliament.

THE FACTS ABOUT THE PROPOSED ABORIGINAL CULTURAL HERITAGE BILL

- The draft Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Bill fails to meet the standards set out by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- The draft Bill does not recognise Aboriginal people as the primary decision makers about their cultural heritage and grants this authority to proponents such as mining companies
- The draft Bill is a backwards step from the current Aboriginal Heritage Act as it places control over critical decision making about Aboriginal cultural heritage in the hands of proponents
- The Aboriginal Cultural Heritage (ACH) Directory proposed in the draft Bill will allow mining companies and other proponents to avoid engaging directly with native title holders about their cultural heritage, and therefore undermines Aboriginal peoples' interest in, control over, and ability to make informed decisions about their cultural heritage
- The proposed ACH Directory fails to recognise the secret and sacred nature of some Aboriginal cultural heritage. In many cases, it is the most culturally important sites are the most secret.

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