

Media statement

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43,000 submissions to protect the Martuwarra Fitzroy River

More than 43,000 people have stood up to protect the Martuwarra Fitzroy River, writing submissions to the WA Government to protect the river in response to the Fitzroy River Water Discussion Paper.

The unprecedented result is one of the biggest in WA's history, with such widespread community support for an environmental issue.

More than 12,000 submissions were made from Western Australians and 31,000 submissions from the rest of the country, all urging the government to stop plans for large-scale water extraction from the National Heritage Listed River.

The discussion paper, which closed for public consultation on Tuesday, considered scenarios to extract more than 408.5GL, including 300GL of surface water from the Fitzroy River.

The Kimberley – Like Nowhere Else campaign coordinator Monique Barker said the response to protect the Fitzroy River and to prevent another Murray-Darling disaster had been powerful.

"The Martuwarra Fitzroy River is loved by people across Australia and the world. It is a sacred Aboriginal Heritage site, a tourism destination, renowned for its barramundi fishing and one of the world's last wild and intact river systems, which is why we've seen so many people send messages to protect the river," she said.

"We've seen the damage done to the Murray-Darling and nobody wants to see that happen to the Fitzroy River."

Traditional Owners, scientists, environmentalists, recreational fishers, some pastoralists and the local communities have all condemned plans to extract water from the River.

Kimberley Land Council CEO Tyronne Garstone said the Martuwarra should be preserved in its current state as a cultural and linguistic landscape.

He said the river is a fundamental and inseparable part of Kimberley Aboriginal people's spiritual connection to their country and customs.

“The cultural management of the Fitzroy River catchment is a responsibility that Traditional Owners have had since creation and take very seriously. Traditional Owners have not consented to large-scale irrigation extraction processes and want to see the river protected as a healthy and thriving ecosystem,” he said.

“Native Title rights are held all along the river making it the first time Traditional Owners hold native title rights across an entire catchment area. This will set a precedent for how government and industry engage with Traditional Owners.

“Whilst the Fitzroy River has been National Heritage Listed for its Indigenous cultural values, to date there is no plan for the management and protection of these values.”

Environs Kimberley director Martin Pritchard said the result of the submission period had been one of the biggest he’d ever seen in WA.

He said the response from the Kimberley had been great with more than 1100 submissions.

“People from across the Kimberley, WA and Australia have made their position clear, that damaging irrigation developments are not welcome in the Fitzroy River,” he said.

“The only ones who stand to benefit from extracting water from the Fitzroy River is big business, while Traditional Owners, the local community, the environment, and tourism and recreational fishing industries lose out.”

Ends.

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