



MEDIA STATEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

10 November 2023

Traditional Owners unite for the Fitzroy River

More than 80 Traditional Owners from 10 Traditional Owner groups across the Kimberley have 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.

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 finalizing 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.”

Media contact:

Gabrielle Timmins, Media Coordinator
M: 0408 436 987 E: Gabrielle.Timmins@klc.org.au

P.O. BOX 2145
BROOME WA 6725
Ph: (08) 9194 0100
www.klc.org.au