



Yamatji Marlpa ABORIGINAL CORPORATION

Proposed AHA changes exclude Traditional Owners

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The YMAC Pilbara Regional Committee is hosting an on Country meeting to discuss the proposed changes to the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972* (AHA) at 11am on Friday, 26 September at Yule River.

The on Country meeting is a much needed opportunity for Traditional Owners to add their voice to the discussion surrounding the protection of Aboriginal Heritage in WA. This will be the first time in almost a decade a meeting this diverse has been held. The Yule River on Kariyarra traditional country has cultural significance as a meeting place.

The Yule River meeting comes in response to the release of proposed amendments to the AHA. The amendments have been put forward more than two years after a review of the AHA and the release of discussion paper. Throughout this process the State Government has failed to engage in meaningful consultation with Traditional Owners on the future of legislation protecting their heritage.

Members of the Government and Opposition have been given the opportunity to attend the meeting to encourage further community consultation. The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Hon Peter Collier MLC will not be attending.

Discussion at the meeting will be lead by YMAC Co-Chairperson and respected Njamal Elder Doris Eaton and respected Banjima Elder Maitland Parker. Aboriginal representative bodies from the Pilbara have also been invited to the meeting and have pledged their support.

Doris Eaton, YMAC Co-Chairperson says there needs to be a strong voice for Aboriginal people to protect their own heritage.

“Any amendments to the *Aboriginal Heritage Act* need to respect Aboriginal heritage and culture. The only way this can be done is by putting Traditional Owners at the centre of decisions that affect their country,” says Mrs Eaton.

Maitland Parker says the Government has not consulted with Aboriginal People throughout the drafting process.

“The proposed changes to the Aboriginal Heritage Act are a step backwards in the recognition of Aboriginal People as pivotal in heritage protection. The Yule River meeting is an important platform for us to voice our opinions and concerns. If these amendments are not challenged

they will have a detrimental impact to our ability to protect sites of significance in the future,” says Mr Parker.

Simon Hawkins, YMAC CEO says the State Government has shown a complete disregard for the views of Traditional Owners throughout this process.

“Aboriginal heritage deserves the same protection as Heritage Listed buildings. The proposed amendments are a wasted opportunity to address the deep inequities entrenched in the Aboriginal heritage protection regime in WA. There is a heavy focus on approvals for industry and little has been done to improve processes for effective consultation and long term protection and management of Aboriginal heritage.

“The State Government must take an active approach to involve Traditional Owners in the reform process, and take advantage of the collaborative relationship they have developed with industry over the last decade”, says Mr Hawkins.

While the on Country meeting is hosted by Pilbara Traditional Owners, all Aboriginal people from WA are welcome to attend the meeting. If members of the WA Aboriginal community or organisations are interested in attending, please contact YMAC on 08 9268 7000.

For further information visit www.aboriginalheritage.net.au

About Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation

Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation (YMAC) is the native title representative body for native title claims in the Pilbara, Murchison and Gascoyne areas of Western Australia. The organisation has a representative area of almost one million square kilometres and represents over 20 native title claims, all with their own language, culture and traditions.

YMAC is a not-for-profit organisation, run by an Aboriginal Board and provides a range of services to its members including claim and future-act representation, heritage protection services, community and economic development and natural resource management.

For interviews please contact:

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