

Aboriginal community demand answers from State Government

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Over 300 people gathered at Yule River in the Pilbara to voice their anger and outrage over the State Government's Aboriginal Heritage Act Amendment Bill and the Regional Services Reform plan, which focuses on assessing the sustainability of Aboriginal communities across Western Australia.

Hosted on Friday 25 September by Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation's Pilbara Regional Committee, the discussions were led by YMAC Co-Chair and respected Njamal Elder Mrs Doris Eaton and respected Banjima Elder Mr Maitland Parker.

Those present at the meeting included Traditional Owners from all over Western Australia, Aboriginal representative bodies from the Pilbara and Kimberley regions, including the Kimberley Land Council's Deputy CEO, Tyronne Garstone and several Board Members, members of Parliament including Terry Redman, Minister for Regional Development, Helen Morton, Minister for Child Protection, Ben Wyatt, Shadow Spokesman for Aboriginal Affairs, Robin Chapple, Member for the Mining and Pastoral Region, Brendon Grylls, Member for Pilbara and Greg McIntyre SC.

The annual on-Country bush meeting gave attendees a rare opportunity to question Minister Redman and Minister Morton on the Regional Services Reform plan which was announced in May.

The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Peter Collier declined the invitation to speak and did not send a representative in his place, for the second year.

YMAC Co-Chair and respected Njamal elder, Doris Eaton spoke about the WA government's inability to close the gap.

"The gap is widening. You do not listen to us. Until you speak with people at the grassroots you will never close the gap. How long is it going to take the government to listen to us? We will come together as a whole group and fight for our rights – because if we don't do it, no one else will do it for us.

"Here I am – the next generation I'm still fighting for basic equality. How many generations will come after me before this happens?" she said.

Simon Hawkins, YMAC CEO said the bush meeting is a sign that Aboriginal voices are still not being heard by the government.

"This is the second year we've hosted this meeting and I find it outrageous that the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs is still refusing to meet with Aboriginal people.

"If the Premier and his government are serious about the recognition of Aboriginal people in the Western Australian Constitution, he and his Ministers need to implement basic, practical measures to this legislation which was designed to protect Australia's First Peoples' heritage – procedural fairness should be first and foremost, not an afterthought," Mr Hawkins said.

Following the meeting, all attendees passed the following resolutions on the two issues:

Aboriginal Heritage Act Amendment Bill Discussion

Resolution:

The Community demands that procedural fairness is in the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972 (WA)* for decisions affecting the heritage of Traditional Owners, and that other legal challenges available to protect threatened heritage sites be investigated.

A delegation will again be sent to Parliament to seek a meeting with the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Hon Peter Collier MLC.

The Government will ensure the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs will attend the Annual On-Country Bush Meeting each year.

Aboriginal Community Closures Discussion

Resolution:

The Community demands a commitment from the State Government to engage with Aboriginal leaders, organisations and service providers to:

- A) Develop terms of reference for the Kimberley and Pilbara Strategic Regional Advisory Councils;
- B) Address these issues more broadly across Western Australia, beyond only forming advisory councils in the Pilbara and Kimberley regions;
- C) Ensure decisions are made with the direct involvement of and for the genuine benefit of Aboriginal communities; and that
- D) The Minister for Regional Development and the Minister for Child Protection agree to attend the 2016 Annual On-Country Bush Meeting at the Yule River Meeting Place, to provide a report on Aboriginal engagement and the advances that have been made to improve remote Western Australian Aboriginal communities.

About Knowledge Partnerships

YMAC's Knowledge Partnerships combines traditional knowledge with corporate and technical experience to create ethical collaborations for Traditional Owner Groups. Our work includes cultural, community and commercial projects, driven by Aboriginal people.

We support our partners with a respectful and culturally-appropriate approach, stemming from over 20 years of shared experience.

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.

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