

Western Australian Alliance of Aboriginal Land Councils

Media Statement

17 August 2016

ABORIGINAL HERITAGE ACT AMENDMENTS SHOULD ADDRESS TRADITIONAL OWNER CONCERNS

The Alliance of WA Aboriginal Land Councils (Alliance) is angered by recent comments made by Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Peter Collier, published on perthnow.com.au.

Nolan Hunter, CEO of Kimberley Land Council, says that Minister Collier's comments that *Yamatji people put forward a suite of amendments that were from 'one of the lawyers who decided they would get an enormous amount of money representing Aboriginal groups'* are disappointing and misrepresent the broader debate put forward by many commentators to highlight the severe deficiencies of the *Aboriginal Heritage Act (AHA) Amendment Bill*.

"The Minister's comments are very disappointing," said Mr Hunter. "Firstly, let me correct the Minister and refer to Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation (YMAC) rather than Yamatji people. The ideas put forward by YMAC were actually changes to the Bill that had been developed and agreed by the Aboriginal leadership of Native Title Representative Bodies and Service Providers across the State. To say otherwise fails to acknowledge that it is actually an Aboriginal position which is commonly held across Western Australia.

"The Bill has been labelled racially discriminatory by a wide range of pundits because if you compare it to the *Heritage of Western Australia Act 1990*, European built heritage is provided with a vastly superior protection regime than that for the protection of Aboriginal heritage.

"The changes proposed by the Alliance were merely an attempt to build in proper protections and procedural fairness for Traditional Owners in order to achieve similar standards that already exist for European heritage in WA," said Mr Hunter.

"If the Minister was serious about engagement with Aboriginal people, he would attend the Yule River on-Country bush meeting on 22 September to explain the Amendment Bill to those who will be affected by any changes to the AHA. But for the third year, the Minister has declined the invite.

"Does the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs not want procedural fairness for Traditional Owners in the Aboriginal Heritage Amendment Bill? If it's good enough for European Heritage, why is it not good enough for Aboriginal Heritage? The Minister still fails to acknowledge the concerns of WA's Aboriginal community and favours industry above the protection of Aboriginal heritage by Traditional Owners," said Mr Hunter.

The WA Alliance of Aboriginal Land Councils is represented by:

Central Desert Native Title Services
Kimberley Land Council
Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation

Goldfields Land and Sea Council
South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council

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