



Pilbara Aboriginal voices unite again for change

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More than 20 Aboriginal people from different language groups across the Pilbara have come together in South Hedland over two days to call for immediate action to improve the lives of Aboriginal people across the region.

Pilbara Aboriginal Voice, Kakurrka Muri (Kariyarra language for Yule River), or PAV, was borne out of the 4th Annual On-Country Bush Meeting at Yule River in 2017.

PAV has already made significant progress working to address issues including language preservation, remote housing, the protection of Aboriginal heritage, Constitutional Recognition, health, education, justice, and the welfare of children.

It was officially endorsed and recognised by both Federal and State Aboriginal Affairs Ministers Ben Wyatt and Senator Nigel Scullion and others at the 5th Annual On-Country Bush Meeting at Yule River in July 2018.

PAV Co-Chairs Danny Brown and Linda Doogiebee said PAV was acknowledged at the meeting as an historic union of language groups working as one voice to call on all levels of government to improve living conditions for Aboriginal West Australians.

“PAV represents the strongest and most unified group of Aboriginal people to form to call for change in the region since the 1946 Pilbara strikes,” Mr Brown said.

“A number of groups that have formed in the Pilbara over recent decades have unfortunately failed, unlike PAV which has been formed by Aboriginal people, for Aboriginal people, at Yule River meetings.”

Ms Doogiebee said PAV was calling on the State Government, whose Ministers have been in town for regional cabinet meetings, to provide ongoing funding for the group to make meaningful change in the region.

“Despite our differences in language and land, we must work together if we are to improve the lives of Aboriginal people in the Pilbara,” Ms Doogiebee said.

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About Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation

Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation (YMAC) is the native title representative body for the Pilbara, Murchison, Mid-West and Gascoyne regions of Western Australia. YMAC has a representative area of over one-third of WA and represents over 24 native title claims, all with their own language, culture and traditions. YMAC is a not-for-profit organisation run by an Aboriginal Board of Directors 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 more information please visit ymac.org.au

About Yule River meetings

Meetings held at Yule River are historic and have been organised by Aboriginal people in the vast Pilbara region for decades. The dry river bed off the North West Coastal Highway, just south of Port Hedland, is seen as a place where people from different language groups can come together to discuss common issues affecting Aboriginal

communities across the region. Stemming from the actions taken in the lead up to the 1946 Pilbara Strike, when Aboriginal people held secret meetings in remote bush locations to plan an ambitious three-year walk off by Aboriginal pastoral workers who were living on cattle stations in conditions of virtual slavery, Pilbara Aboriginal people continued in their efforts to advocate for improved conditions and outcomes by organising bush meetings. During the land rights era, from the late-1970s, Yule River became the focal point for such gatherings which were often attended by up to 2,000 Aboriginal people from all over the Pilbara. At this time, “Old Man Parker” (born Herbert), was the Pilbara representative for the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee, the first national body elected by Aboriginal people, and introduced by the Whitlam Government. Mr Parker presided over these meetings on the river’s sandy banks as Aboriginal people from all over the Pilbara region gathered to talk about lands trust business, housing complaints, and land rights. Many important initiatives have been borne from Yule River meetings, with both concerns and solutions coming directly from Pilbara Aboriginal people; and with government expected to attend to hear and address their concerns. Through the efforts of then YMAC Co-Chairperson, Mrs Doris Eaton (whose father was a key player in the 1946 Pilbara Strike), and the YMAC Pilbara Regional Committee, the Yule River meetings recommenced in 2014. All language groups from across the region are invited to attend these meetings and share their concerns. Much like they were decades ago, gatherings at Yule River are an important opportunity for a diverse range of Aboriginal voices to be heard.