



TRADITIONAL OWNERS SPEAK OUT ON THE IMPORTANCE OF HERITAGE PROTECTION

By Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation

On 26 September over 200 Traditional Owners and other interested community members from across Western Australia met at Yule River, 60km southwest of Port Hedland, to voice their concerns over the proposed amendments to the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972* (AHA).

The meeting was hosted by the Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation's (YMAC) Pilbara Regional Committee. Respected Njamal Elder and YMAC Co-Chairperson Mrs Doris Eaton was joined by respected Banjima Elder Maitland Parker to lead the discussion. These discussions provided a much needed opportunity for Traditional Owners to contribute their voice to discussions surrounding Aboriginal Heritage protection in WA. Key concerns raised at the meeting were a lack of consultation with Aboriginal people and the ongoing inequality between Aboriginal people and industry under the AHA.

Mrs Eaton urged those in attendance to unite with one voice.

"These proposed amendments to the *Aboriginal Heritage Act* do not respect Aboriginal heritage and culture. Traditional Owners must be at the centre of decisions that affect their country. We will stand united and speak with one voice until our heritage is given the same respect as built heritage," she said.

Aboriginal Representative Bodies and members of Parliament MLA Brendan Grylls, Member for the Pilbara, and MLC Robin Chapple, Member for Mining and Pastoral Region, attended the meeting to take part in the discussions and were also given the opportunity to address the meeting. The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, MLC Peter Collier, declined an invitation to attend.

Simon Hawkins, YMAC CEO, said opposition to the amendments was widespread.

"Since the Yule River meeting over 1600 people from around Western Australia have signed a petition calling on the Government to abandon the proposed

amendments and create a new process more inclusive of Traditional Owners.

"The WA legislation, in its current form, is not at a standard expected in the 21st century when it comes to the conservation and management of heritage sites. We want to see this legislation reflect a modern view and it must be consistent with other similar legislation in Australia," he said.

A delegation travelled to Parliament on 20 November. The delegation called on the Legislative Assembly to form a Select Committee, with the intention to develop a new framework to reform the AHA, this time including a meaningful discussion with Traditional Owners.

Above left: Traditional Owner Anthony Dann speaking at the meeting.

Above right: Banjima Elder Maitland Parker addressing the meeting.

Credits: Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation



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