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SPECIAL EDITION



Community closures:
We're fighting for you

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Aboriginal people in WA are under attack by the State Government. Its plans to close Aboriginal communities and make changes to the WA Aboriginal Heritage Act show complete disrespect and disregard for our people.

The KLC, as the representative for all Kimberley mob, has been speaking up to tell the government that what it is doing is wrong. Closing communities is attempted assimilation of Aboriginal people into white Australia. It is separating our people from their land and culture. This is bad government policy. We don't want history to repeat itself. Forcing our people off our land didn't work before, and it's not going to work now.

The government has no plan, which is why there has been lots of uncertainty. We know lots of people are scared that their community could be closed. We want information but the government won't tell us which Kimberley communities are being targeted and what criteria is being used to close communities.

We've been calling on Colin Barnett and the State Government to meet with us but they have refused. We want to sit down with the government to talk about this issue. We know we can build better communities, without having to close them.

The State Government said community closures had to happen because the Federal Government cut funding for municipal services – power, water and rubbish collection. We need to reallocate resources so we use them more effectively and efficiently. To do this Aboriginal people need to be in the driver's seat, leading the process. We know our mob and we know what works. We want to make improvements; we want responsibility. The government needs to respect our laws and culture.

United Nations

Closing Aboriginal communities is a human rights issue. Aboriginal people have the same rights as all other Australians, but yet we are still being treated differently. That's why the KLC is going to the United Nations in New York to talk about community closures. We want to raise international awareness and gain support from other countries so we can push back on the government.

KLC Chairman Anthony Watson and CEO Nolan Hunter are going to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues from April 20. We have been fighting for our rights to live on country for 200 years. Through native title we won those rights. About 70 percent of the Kimberley is determined native title and the KLC is working hard to get good outcomes for the remaining claims. We are using our native title land to build businesses and create jobs in remote communities, through the Kimberley Ranger Network and the Indigenous Protected Area programs. Living in remote communities enables us to live on and connect to our country, culture and people. This is a right worth fighting for and we hope that by going to the United Nations we get international support.

Message from the Chairman



Community closures is a really serious issue. If the State Government closes our remote communities it's going to have long-term impacts on our people. We don't want to be kicked off our country again. We know moving us off our land doesn't work. Where would we go? Towns are already overcrowded. There's lots of uncertainty.

Dirty tricks

The KLC has been working to get some answers out of the government but they are refusing to give us any information. This makes it really hard for us because we have solutions and we want the government to engage with us. But the State Government is playing dirty tricks. It has come under lots of pressure for wanting to close communities – people have been protesting and criticising the government. Closing communities is supposed to be about economics – providing power and water – but the government is trying to make it about child abuse and child safety.

The Premier, Colin Barnett, is saying our children are not safe in communities to try and justify closing them. We know this is not true. He's using child safety as an excuse because he has no plan. We need to stay strong and make sure the government doesn't get away with this. It's trying to tarnish all of us with the same brush. Child safety is important but has nothing to do with funding cuts and closing our communities.

Regional approach

The government is trying to pick off our communities one by one. It is trying to divide and conquer. We need to take a regional approach, so we are stronger. We need to work through the KLC because it represents all of us and can help us to fight the government.

People need to be cautious of government ministers and representatives coming to visit our communities. They are coming in asking lots of questions but giving us no information about the closures. We don't want to give them any information because they might use it against us. We also don't want government visits to our communities to count as consultation. We want real engagement and proper discussion. The government needs to stop talking about us and start talking with us. If government ministers come into your community, tell them to go and meet with the KLC because it is our representative body and there to support us.

Standing together

At the KLC we are looking at all options to fight community closures and we will need your support, so we can show the government that Kimberley mob all stand together. There will be more protests in our communities and if you can, it would be great if you could all join in to send a clear message to the government that closing remote communities in the Kimberley is not an option.

ANTHONY WATSON

Contact Us

The KLC represents all Kimberley Aboriginal people and we are here to support you. If you want to know more about community closures or any other issues in your region feel free to ask your board member or contact the KLC. If government ministers or representatives want to come to your community, let us know and we can assist you. You can contact the KLC at our offices in Broome, Derby and Kununurra.

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