

**Kimberley Land Council**

**Statement from KLC Board Meeting: Aboriginal Cultural Heritage 6 July 2021**

The board of the Kimberley Land Council (KLC) has urged the WA Aboriginal Affairs Minister Stephen Dawson to stop dismissing the grave concerns of Aboriginal people surrounding the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Bill.

KLC Chair, Anthony Watson says the Minister is deflecting from the real issue.

“For the minister for Aboriginal Affairs to use patronising language, call our concerns misguided and suggest the Kimberley Land Council is the only organisation that is deeply concerned about the proposed new bill – is gaslighting his own constituents.

The Kimberley Land Council is voicing the concerns of our members. Those concerns have been supported by Elders and Traditional Owners and by Native Title representative bodies WA wide. Aboriginal people around the state *are deeply troubled* about the future of the protection of their heritage.” Mr Watson said.

“If the minister is to enter into fair and considered discussion, he must also stop misrepresenting Aboriginal peoples’ requests to be at the centre of decisions about their cultural heritage as calls for a ‘veto on mining’. This is the Aboriginal heritage act, not the mining act.”

KLC Chair Anthony Watson said Mr Dawson needed to have a two-way discussion with Aboriginal groups, rather than the planned ‘briefing sessions’.

“KLC agrees the current bill is outdated, but the proposed new bill is not going to offer any further protection of our cultural heritage. No one wants to see another disaster like Juukan gorge or the damage to the Garnkiny and Jawaren sites in our own East Kimberley.”

“If Mr Dawson is genuine about putting Aboriginal people at the centre of decision-making he should allow for industry and Aboriginal people to sit down together to come up with a joint position,” Mr Watson said.

“It is disappointing the Minister has failed to hear our concerns about the numerous failings in the draft laws, which will allow proponents to avoid engaging directly with native title holders when making critical decisions about Aboriginal cultural heritage.”

“Aboriginal people want to make decisions about their own cultural heritage. We don’t want to make decisions about mining. The government and mining companies shouldn’t be making decisions about cultural heritage and that’s what we object to in the new laws.”

The KLC has reiterated its statement delivered to WA Parliament last month, where it called on the Minister to convene a forum of representatives from government, industry, native title groups and native title representative bodies from across Western Australia to ensure any new legislation is best practice and fit for purpose.

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