



Minister declines Cultural Heritage protection conversation with Aboriginal people

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On the eve of the 7th Annual On-Country Bush Meeting at the Yule River Meeting Place, it is with disappointment that YMAC shares the news that the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs has declined the opportunity to attend the important event.

The Yule River meeting, which is where Aboriginal people will discuss their concerns about cultural heritage protection, is being held on Wednesday 25 and Thursday 26 August. The focus of discussions will be on the *Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Bill*, which Minister Stephen Dawson intends to introduce to parliament this year.

During the State Government's 18 August presentation on its latest amendments to the Bill limited information was provided to show how - in practice - heritage will be able to be protected by the owners of Australia's Cultural Heritage in Western Australia.

YMAC CEO Mr Simon Hawkins said the Minister's no-show is a missed opportunity to hear directly from the community.

"The Labor Government consistently states that agreement-making is at the heart of the *Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Bill*, but the Minister's non-attendance flies in the face of those claims."

"It is disappointing that the Minister, who is also the Member for the Mining and Pastoral Region, has not seen fit to send a representative on his behalf to what is one of the most important annual events for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of the Pilbara."

The Minister has attended previous Yule River meetings and has made a commitment to co-designing the associated regulations for the new heritage laws with Aboriginal people. This event is a prime opportunity to sit together with Aboriginal people to discuss the bill, explain government's thinking behind these latest drafts, and – importantly - inform implementation.

His non-attendance does not inspire confidence.

All quotes to be attributed to Mr Simon Hawkins, CEO Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation.



About Yule River Bush Meetings

Meetings held at Yule River are historic, having 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.

The meetings stemmed 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.

About Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation

Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation (YMAC) is the Native Title Representative Body (NTRB) for what are described as the Pilbara (Marlpa) and Geraldton (Yamatji) regions of Western Australia. YMAC is run by an Aboriginal Board of Directors, representing several native title groups, each of whom has their own language, culture, traditions and protocols. YMAC provides a range of services, including native title claim and future act representation, heritage services, executive office, community, economic development assistance, and natural resource management support.

Media contact: **Jane Mitchell**, Communications Manager, email jmitchell@ymac.org.au or editor@ymac.org.au , mobile **0427 463 796**.