



Pilbara Traditional Owners want proposed heritage laws scrapped

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Photo: Pilbara Traditional Owners voting at 2021 On Country Bush meeting at the Yule River Meeting Place on 26 August 2021

Aboriginal people from across the Pilbara today came together at Yule River to unanimously reject the *Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Bill* which the State Government will push through Parliament this year.

YMAC Deputy Co-Chairperson Pilbara Region and Njama/Pitjekarli Elder, Mrs Doris Eaton said the people of the Pilbara reject the Bill and want the Government to come to talk to Aboriginal people.

“We gathered about the heritage bill. It should be consulted with Aboriginal People, but the Government wrote it without us. We want to write it with them.

“If we were at the table, things could be different. For us we want to save our heritage for the future generations. Culture is slowly getting lost. We are not against mining. We want to be spoken to.

“Ask us, not tell us what we want. We have no say, the government have the first and last say.”

Those present also expressed their disappointment that the Labour Government did not send any representation to have direct conversations about the Bill. Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, The Hon. Stephen Dawson MLC was invited but did not attend or send a



representative to the meeting. These conversations with the owners of culture are of global significance.

Kariyarra Traditional Owners Raylene Button of echoed Mrs Eaton's concerns, calling for Aboriginal people to challenge the government.

"We are very disappointed in Minister Dawson not coming here to meet with us, yet we hear he will be in Hedland the day after our meeting.

"The reason we are here is to come together as a community. For us it's do or die in terms of the Bill. Things have been done in secret, without full consultation. How can someone else have the say about our heritage and our identity? They need to stop making decisions for and about us, let us speak it."

The community resolved to march to demonstrate their unhappiness in Perth and in their own towns on Saturday 23 October.

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.



Yamatji Marlpa
ABORIGINAL CORPORATION



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.

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