



Take me to the river: have a yarn at Yule

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The last On-Country Bush Meeting at Yule River was held in 2021 and focused on heritage protection. Picture: José Kalpers

WA's Aboriginal Affairs Minister Tony Buti, Senator Dorinda Cox, Commissioner for Children and Young People Jacqueline McGowan-Jones and Voice Referendum Working Group member Thomas Mayo have confirmed their attendance at the 2023 On-Country Bush Meeting at Yule River – the first since 2021. Federal Minister for Indigenous Australians Linda Burney has reached out regarding the event and YMAC looks forward to confirmation she can attend.

Cancelled last year due to COVID concerns, the event is an initiative from Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation's Pilbara Regional Committee and will be held on Kariyarra Country at the Yule River Meeting Place, 55km south of Port Hedland, on 12 and 13 July.

In a first for the event, a new format was trialled this year with a pre-event planning workshop in April that saw more than 35 Elders and Emerging Leaders come together to discuss existing issues in the region while sharing ideas for change.

A draft call-to-action statement was developed, reflecting their voices, viewpoints, lived experiences and industry insights, in readiness for the main Yule River event.

The first day of the Yule River meeting is reserved for First Nations community members only and features an update on cultural heritage protection, a presentation and conversation on the Voice referendum with Thomas Mayo and further discussion to finalise the call-to-action statement.



From 6pm, 12 July, a family-friendly free dinner is on offer, together with a cultural performance and live music from the Henry & Ranahl Band, ready to deliver their unique brand of country rock-pop.

On 13 July, invited government representatives and decision-makers from government agencies and departments will attend the event to listen and discuss the community's concerns in relation to the call-to-action statement.

Aboriginal Affairs Minister Tony Buti, Senator Dorinda Cox and Commissioner for Children and Young People Jacqueline McGowan-Jones will provide responses to the statement, followed by a question-and-answer session.

Community information stalls on both days will feature the Pilbara Aboriginal Health Alliance, First Nations Clean Energy, Pilbara Regiment, YMAC, Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage and IDCare (presenting a Cyber Resilience Outreach Clinic).

YMAC Co-Chairperson – Pilbara Region, Miss Natalie Parker, said the On-Country Bush Meeting at Yule River was an important event that ensured First Nations peoples remained at the centre of decisions affecting them and their communities.

“This is the eighth Yule River meeting since 2014 and once again we’re bringing people together so they can talk about the needs of their people and communities,” she said.

“At the same time, people from government can hear from us directly, as we yarn about our concerns and come up with solutions they can help us with.

“Past experience at Yule River has shown what we can achieve when we work together so there is real potential for significant changes to be made.

“Of particular importance this year is making sure people have all the details of the proposed Indigenous Voice to Parliament and what’s involved in the referendum, which is why I’m glad Thomas Mayo accepted our invitation.

“I’m also pleased various government representatives have shown their commitment through their willingness to attend and listen to what we have to say.”

Updates and further details about the event are available at ymac.org.au.

ENDS

All quotes to be attributed to Miss Natalie Parker, Co-Chairperson – Pilbara Region, 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 riverbed 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 that were often attended by up to 2000 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 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 come 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 started again 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), delivering native title and other services across the Pilbara, Mid West, Murchison and Gascoyne regions of Western Australia. YMAC is run by a First Nations board of directors, representing several native title groups, each of whom have their own language, culture, traditions and protocols. YMAC services include native title claim and future act representation; heritage services; executive office, community, and economic development assistance; land administration, and natural resource management support.

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