



Pilbara Aboriginal community endorses Call to Action

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**Nyamal/Pitjkarli Elder Mrs Doris Eaton on Day 1 of the Annual On-Country Bush Meeting at Yule River
(Image: José Kalpers, YMAC)**

Day 1 of the 8th Annual On-Country Bush Meeting at Yule River saw Aboriginal people from across the Pilbara endorse an action statement, and signal support for the Voice to Parliament Yes vote.

Community members are calling on local, State and Federal governments to better meet their commitments and requirements set out in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, the WA State Government Empowerment Strategy, and the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The Yule River Call to Action statement calls for government to take on a more genuine, grassroots approach to working with community on placed-based solutions they have identified in six key areas of concern: Systemic Reform, Education, Health, Housing, Wellbeing, and Community Safety.

Community members spoke of the need for action, unity and leadership to create significant change. They agreed that a well-resourced Pilbara leadership group is necessary to lead this change, and better connect government and community.



Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation (YMAC) developed the draft statement through a workshop of Elders and emerging leaders in April. The workshop nominated an eleven-member working group to finalise a draft call to action that was circulated prior to being presented and further discussed at the Yule River meeting. Vigorous and passionate discussion on community issues drew out further solutions to better support and empower Aboriginal people in the Pilbara.

The meeting also heard from Mr Thomas Mayo, member of the Federal Government's Voice Referendum Working Group. Following his presentation and community discussion, the meeting chair called for a show of hands in support of the Voice to Parliament. An overwhelming majority raised their hands, with others wanting further information.

Day 2 of the Yule River meeting will see the Aboriginal community welcome several high-profile Ministers and decision-makers, to hear and respond to the refined Call to Action. They include: the Hon. Richard Marles MP – Acting Prime Minister of Australia; the Hon. Linda Burney MP – Minister for Indigenous Australians; the Hon. Tony Buti – Minister for Education; Aboriginal Affairs; Citizenship and Multicultural Interests; Senator Dorinda Cox; Ms Jacqueline McGowan-Jones – Commissioner for Children and Young People; and Ms Jody Broun – Chief Executive Officer of the National Indigenous Australians Agency.

YMAC will finalise the Call to Action, incorporating additional actions identified by community and release to government, in coming days.

All YMAC 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 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



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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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