



MEDIA RELEASE

Tuesday, 19 June 2018

Kimberley Traditional Owners establish Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council

Kimberley Traditional Owners will meet with State Government representatives in Perth today during the first ever gathering of the newly formed Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council.

The Aboriginal body will urge government and industry to support the council as the new Traditional Owner representative group for management of the Fitzroy River and its catchment.

In a statement issued today, Traditional Owners have called for the implementation of the 2016 Fitzroy River Declaration, immediate design and implementation of a Martuwarra Fitzroy River Catchment Management Plan, and a moratorium on all future water allocations in the Fitzroy River catchment until the plan is in place.

In the Fitzroy Valley, native title has been determined along the length of the Fitzroy River and across the entire catchment area. Traditional Owners also own approximately half of the pastoral leases in the catchment, meaning Aboriginal people are the key group government and industry must work with in relation to management of the river.

This is the first time that Traditional Owners hold native title rights across an entire catchment area, setting a precedent for how government and industry engage with Traditional Owners. The Fitzroy River has been National Heritage Listed for its Indigenous cultural values but to date there is no plan for the management and protection of these values.

Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council member and Nyikina woman Dr Anne Poelina says Traditional Owners want to see culturally and environmentally appropriate development that is sustainable in the long-term.

"We have an obligation globally with climate change and water scarcity to work together to prevent a disaster on this National Heritage Listed Fitzroy River and learn from the lessons of the Murray Darling Basin," Dr Poelina said.

"This is not about stopping development, this is about doing development the right and sustainable way with Traditional Owners at the front and centre of any decision making."

The Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council was established following a meeting of Traditional Owners in Fitzroy Crossing on May 15 and 16, 2018.

The meeting was in response to the WA State Government's proposal to develop a management plan, water allocation plan and a national park along the Fitzroy River concurrently, as well as significant development pressure from industry.

At the meeting, Traditional Owners expressed concerns about the proposals, including:

- Any management plan must address the issues that are outlined in the Fitzroy River Declaration.
- The applicability of the current State Government joint management approach on lands already under existing sole Indigenous ownership, control or management.
- The view that all of the river needs protected area status, not just some small areas, and that it would be difficult to consider the details of a protected area or national park without first developing a catchment wide management plan.
- The need for government to engage in a consistent and transparent way with all groups.
- That Traditional Owners should not be asked to give away land or cultural sites to anyone for any reason, and that all groups should be involved in any future protected area negotiations as what happens in one part of the river impacts all of the river.
- Traditional Owners will not accept any water allocation plan that leaves Traditional Owners with leftover water after everyone else has taken out water first.

Traditional Owners collectively raised their concerns about development pressure along the Fitzroy River in November 2016, with the issuing of the landmark Fitzroy River Declaration.

The historic declaration identified eight key steps to protect and manage the Fitzroy River, including a buffer zone for development, a joint position on fracking, development of a Fitzroy River management plan complemented by an Indigenous Protected Area, and a management body for the river.

The establishment of the Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council is the next step in this process. The council includes representation from Prescribed Bodies Corporates and native title applicants along the Fitzroy River.

The inaugural meeting of the council will be held in Perth at 10am and will include a delegation of 12 Traditional Owners together with government representatives.

There will be an interview and picture opportunity at Parliament House at 1.15pm. Please contact Monique Paschke on 0408 436 987 if you would like to attend.

To read the full statement of the Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council, as well as the 2016 Fitzroy River Declaration see the attached documents.