Kimberley Land Council

MEDIA RELEASE 6 MARCH 2015

Barnett's actions threaten state's cultural, social, and economic future

Actions and comments by Premier Colin Barnett threaten the social, cultural, and economic future of the state, claims the Kimberley Land Council.

The Kimberley Land Council was today highly critical of Premier Barnett's comments on his intention to close down remote communities, and his determination to proceed with unfair and discriminatory changes to the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act.

"The Premier's claim that preventing abuse of children is driving his intention to close remote Aboriginal communities is appalling," said KLC Chairman Anthony Watson.

“Demonising Aboriginal people like this damages Aboriginal people, damages the reputation of the State, and takes on a backward path.”

“We see a pattern from the Premier of making broad, unfounded statements about Aboriginal people and Aboriginal affairs, yet he declines our invitations to meet with him and work out positive solutions.”

"Threats to close down our communities, and proposed changes to the Heritage Act, strike at the heart of Indigenous culture, identity, and economic and social well-being."

"They also weaken the social and economic position of the whole state."

Whilst acknowledging that the Heritage Act needs a thorough review, the KLC sees the Government's current proposals as discriminatory, lacking in procedural fairness, and heavily weighted towards government and industry.

"We are more than willing to work with government to revamp the Heritage Act," said Mr Watson, "and we invite the government to work with us on a range of improvements.

"But in its current form, changes to the Act are not acceptable to Kimberley Aboriginal people, and we will oppose them."

"These changes, and any actions we are forced to take in opposing them, place the working relationship we have established with industry and developers at risk, jeopardizing the economic future of the state," said Mr Watson. "Responsibility for this will rest with the Premier."

The KLC also noted the negative economic impact that closing remote communities would have on the state.
"The cost, both economic and social, of closing our remote communities needs very close scrutiny," said Mr Watson.

"We believe that closing communities will cost Aboriginal people in terms of identity, relationship to country, health, and well-being. These costs will be passed on to the already under-resourced larger towns, service providers, local governments, housing, health . . . costing the state for generations to come."

"Kimberley Aboriginal people are clearly opposed to community closures."

"There is a better way forward. We have identified a wide range of measures that Aboriginal people and governments can take to improve efficiencies, save money, reduce waste, develop employment, and strengthen communities," said Mr Watson.

"At the same time, people can live on and care for their country, providing a valuable service to the whole state. Instead of failure, we invite government to take a stake in developing a positive future for our people and our communities."

"The KLC is open to constructive talks with government. We want to find solutions, for the good of our own people, and for the whole state."

"Premier Barnett's decision not to accept an invitation to meet with the Alliance of Aboriginal Land Councils in Broome is extremely disappointing, and a missed opportunity for the Premier to engage with Aboriginal people."

"At exactly the same time that Aboriginal people from across the state were meeting in Broome, our Premier was drinking coffee in Perth, and saying a review of remote communities would find abuse of children."

"Western Australians deserve better from their Premier."

ENDS ............

Media Contact – Joe Fox 08 9194 0100 mob 0417 901 722 joe.fox@klc.org.au