



Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council Statement from Combined Meeting of Traditional Owner Groups for the Fitzroy River Catchment

Meeting Held May 15-16 2018 Fitzroy Crossing

Traditional Owners met in Fitzroy Crossing on the 15th and 16th May 2018 and called for a collaborative catchment scale approach to manage the challenges, risks and opportunities related to northern development.

We have a responsibility as a nation and globally to learn from the Australian Murray Darling Basin story and we can prevent a disaster in the Fitzroy River Catchment and the urgency is now.

Traditional Owners assert the Fitzroy River Declaration (2016) establishes the fundamental principles and philosophy for a cultural and environmental heritage governance model for sustainable river and catchment management. It is a collective response from Traditional Owners to maintain the spiritual, cultural and environmental health of the catchment, providing the basis for a collaborative approach for an inclusive water governance model and catchment management plan.

Traditional Owners call for the following:

- Recognising that the Principles from the FITZROY RIVER DECLARATION of November 2016 reflect the values and aspirations of Traditional Owner groups across the Fitzroy River Catchment.
- Recognising that the ultimate decision-making responsibility for the land, sea and waters encompassed within the Fitzroy River Catchment resides with the Prescribed Bodies Corporates and Registered Native Title Claimants that are responsible for each of the Native Title Groups in the Fitzroy Catchment.
- The meeting endorses a proposal that the WA State Government legislates for the future management of the Fitzroy River Catchment with legislation that formally recognises that the Fitzroy River is central to the law, culture, traditional practice and responsibilities of the Traditional Owners who are the custodians of the land and waters of the Fitzroy River Catchment.
- That the groups representing native title interests at the meeting agree to establish a Council of Traditional Owner Groups with traditional responsibility for land and waters within the Fitzroy River Catchment and to approach the Commonwealth and WA State Governments to engage with the proposed Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council in matters relating to the development of a comprehensive Fitzroy River Catchment Management Plan.

- The meeting calls on the WA State Government to recognise the Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council as the agreed forum for the WA Government, its agencies and other third-party interests to engage with in matters relating to Aboriginal interests in the future planning and management of the Fitzroy River Catchment.
- The meeting calls on the WA Government to initiate the comprehensive Fitzroy River Catchment Management Planning process in which Aboriginal interests are at the table from the outset and involved in all aspects of future decision making in relation to the future of the Fitzroy River Catchment.
- The meeting requests the Commonwealth and WA State Governments to adequately resource the operations and deliberations of the MFRC to allow it to formulate informed policies and sustainable positions regarding the planning and sustaining of the Fitzroy River Catchment and to enable the Council to obtain the consent of PBCs and Registered Native Title Claimant Groups for the adoption of the Management Plan.
- That a Moratorium be placed on all future Water Allocations in the Fitzroy River Catchment until a Martuwarra Fitzroy River Catchment Management Plan is completed and implemented.
- The meeting recognises that the KLC as the Native Title Representative Body has a role in supporting the deliberations of the Native Title Traditional Owner Groups in the Fitzroy River Catchment and that the KLC should be resourced appropriately to fulfil their responsibilities as the Representative Body in supporting the MFRC and the development of the Martuwarra Catchment Plan.

At the May 15 and 16 meeting, the establishment of the Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council was endorsed by representatives from Traditional Owner groups of the Fitzroy River Catchment, from the Fitzroy River's headwaters in the northern Kimberley ranges to the river mouth near Derby. These groups include: Wilinggin, Kija, Bunuba, Gooniyandi, Walmajarri, Nyikina Mangala and Warrwa.