



Kimberley Land Council



Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre



Kimberley Language  
Resource Centre

through

**Kimberley Land Council**

P.O. Box 2145 BROOME WA 6725  
Phone: (08) 9193 6199 Facsimile: (08) 9193 6279

**MEDIA RELEASE**

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***Kimberley Aboriginal people call for partnership with government, private sector to address issues***

Meeting this week at Jarlmadangah, Kimberley Aboriginal people called upon government and industry to work with them in responding to the multitude of challenges facing the region and affecting the future of their people.

More than 400 Aboriginal people from across the Kimberley gathered at Jarlmadangah for the Annual General Meetings of their peak bodies, the Kimberley Land Council, the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre, and the Kimberley Language Resource Centre. They also came to celebrate Jarlmadangah community's 20 successful years of operation.

Wide ranging discussions were held about current and impending issues affecting the lives of Kimberley Aboriginal people.

"Mining and exploration are booming in the Kimberley, and the challenges we face require a response that goes beyond securing title to our land and protecting our heritage," said KLC Chairman Tom Birch. "The challenges are about ensuring that Kimberley Aboriginal people have a real economic stake in the proposed development of the Kimberley, including the exploitation of resources, water, agriculture, fishing, tourism, and pastoralism."

"We encourage government and industry to be pro-active in working with our people to create real jobs within our region," said Mr Birch.

Calling for changes in the ways government engages with Indigenous people, the Chair of the Kimberley Language Resource Centre, Ms June Oscar, said "We require a new paradigm in the way the public sector, both State and Commonwealth, responds to our needs for civic services."

"We would welcome real dialogue and commitment from governments about how we might jointly work in partnership to confront the devastation being experienced by our people," said Ms Oscar.

"Many of our countrymen and women live in poverty, and their life circumstances are severe and chronic. We have neither the resources nor the commitment from governments to allow us to participate in finding solutions. Governments still seem to be prepared to adopt the worn out public sector model of individual silo approaches and top-down management."

Whilst congratulating the leadership taken by the women of the Fitzroy Valley in confronting alcohol abuse and damage to children, the meeting was dismayed by the lack of meaningful change over many decades.

“This is shameful. It is a bad mark against our modern day society,” said Mr Tommy May, Chairman of the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre. “We are part of Australia. Nowhere else in Australia would it be acceptable for Australian people to live in these conditions.”

“The type of leadership shown in the Fitzroy Valley is required in many of our other communities. We call upon government to assist us in bringing together leaders from government, bureaucracy, and the Aboriginal community to take the actions required to address the problems we confront today, and the longer term consequences of alcohol and drug abuse on our young adults. We want action, not lip service,” said Mr May.

Those present at the meeting were shown just what can be achieved by Aboriginal people, with government and private sector support, when the Jarlmadangah community outlined the history of their community and it’s achievements since it was founded twenty years ago.

Jarlmadangah community leaders Mr Anthony Watson and Mr William Watson presented certificates of appreciation to both the Aboriginal and the non-Aboriginal leaders who have helped them on their long road of becoming a culturally and socially sustainable and modern mainstream community, participating in service delivery and small business. Jarlmadangah’s success was put forward as a source of hope and encouragement for all Kimberley Aboriginal people.

Kimberley Land Council Executive Director Mr Wayne Bergmann outlined a plan for the future of Kimberley Indigenous people, involving the participation of resource developers, industry, and governments. This plan includes the establishment of a Kimberley-wide approach to future economic, social, environmental, and cultural opportunities and responsibilities.

“The development and utilisation of the knowledge base within the Kimberley Aboriginal community will assist us all – Aboriginal people, government, and industry - in together addressing the many challenges we face. By truly building on the contributions of our past leaders, this promises to be an exciting, lasting, and worthwhile focus for the future of Kimberley people,” said Mr Bergmann.

“The members of our organisations now call for a summit to deal with the challenges facing our people. We call on the Prime Minister and the Premier, together with industry leaders, to meet with our Chairs to talk about the issues that our people face, and the ways we can together deal with them.”

Members instructed the Chairs of their respective organisations, the Kimberley Land Council, the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre, and the Kimberley Language Resource Centre, to write to the heads of government, bringing their attention to these and other related matters.

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**Media contact: Joe Fox - 08 9193 6199      0417 901 722      [joe.fox@klc.org.au](mailto:joe.fox@klc.org.au)      [www.klc.org.au](http://www.klc.org.au)**

*Mr Wayne Bergmann, Executive Director of the Kimberley Land Council, will be available for interview in relation to this release.*

*Information on the Jarlmadangah community and its achievements can be found at <http://www.jarlmadangah.com/>*

*Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre’s website is: <http://www.kalacc.org.au/>*