



Media Release

Wednesday 29th September, 2010

North Queensland Indigenous Groups reject Abbott's intervention on Wild Rivers

We are a diverse group of Traditional Owners with rights and interests in seven declared Wild River Areas – Settlement Creek, Gregory River, Morning Inlet, Staaten River, Archer River, Hinchinbrook Island Rivers and the Wenlock River. We have a delegation travelling to Canberra today to deliver the following message to Tony Abbott and Parliament.

We totally reject Tony Abbott's intervention on Wild Rivers. We support sustainable development and we are keen to see the creation of employment opportunities for Aboriginal people. But Mr Abbott's legislation of itself will do nothing to create employment, support improved livelihoods or economic independence and do nothing to protect our Heritage. We call on Parliament to reject Tony Abbott's anti-Wild Rivers Bill and move to a proper recognition of the principles of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Tony Abbott's intention to overturn Wild Rivers does not have our support and he should drop his crusade immediately. We call on the Parliament to talk with the relevant Traditional Owners who have experience of this legislation and who have the right under Indigenous governance to speak on such matters, to find out the truth about Wild Rivers and oppose Tony Abbott's Bill.

We call on Tony Abbott to acknowledge that Noel Pearson does not speak for all Indigenous Australians - he is not our elected leader. Abbott needs to acknowledge that we have our own voices and can speak for ourselves, or elect our own representatives to do so.

We are determined to ensure that Mr Abbott does not undermine our local Indigenous organisations, our efforts to participate in the Australian economy or our management plans for Wild River declarations on our own lands. Wild Rivers is supporting the proper Indigenous management of country including homelands-based initiatives and sustainable enterprise, and provides important employment, training and capacity building opportunities for our people.

Mr Abbott says he is fighting for our property rights, self-determination and our right to development. If he wants us to believe that, he should reverse the Coalition's opposition, and support the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. He should also support local Indigenous organisations, since they are the real voice of Aboriginal people.

Tony Abbott should support the Parliament to review the Native Title Act to deliver on our rights to conservation, development AND the right to free, prior and informed consent for ALL land use activities.

When Mr Abbott stands up for our full set of rights, including the right to prevent the destruction and exploitation of our land and rivers by others, we will take his new found enthusiasm for our rights seriously. Until then, we call on the Parliament to listen to the proper Traditional Owners of these rivers and reject Mr Abbott's Bill.

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