



Kaanju Ngaachi
Wenlock and Pascoe Rivers
Cape York Peninsula
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We Kuuku I'yu (northern Kaanju) or Kaanichi Pama are 'inland' people belonging to the highlands - the mountains, tablelands and sand ridge country of central Cape York Peninsula, Northern Australia. Ngaachi refers to our 'homelands', traditional 'country' and 'home'. My homelands are located on the Wenlock and Pascoe Rivers of Cape York Peninsula.

The Wenlock is one of Australia's healthiest and most spectacular rivers, with more freshwater fish species than any other river in the country, and freshwater springs with rich biodiversity. My ancestors have looked after the Wenlock River since time immemorial.

The whole Wenlock River and its tributaries have enormous cultural significance as the Creator of all of Ngaachi under the umbrella of Pianamu, the Rainbow Serpent.

We are obliged under Kaanju law and custom to look after Ngaachi sustainably. In return our Stories, which are the land, will look after us physically, culturally and spiritually.

The Wenlock River is threatened by mining, weeds and feral animals, and needs protection and proper Indigenous management.

Since returning to the land, the Kuuku I'yu have built a new model of sustainable economic development, based on Traditional law and governance, conservation, collaboration, conservation economy and unity. This includes proper Kaanju land management, eco-tourism, sustainable harvest of plant products and organic meat production.

Importantly, our main objectives for economic development are to provide permanent full-time employment for local people, to be sustainable and generate income to support the permanent reoccupation of homelands.

The health of our future economy depends on a healthy Wenlock River and healthy land.

Conservationists have raised problems with the threats of mining to our river, particularly from bauxite mining companies Cape Alumina, and Rio Tinto Alcan, which currently has 'rights' to take 80% of the water from the Wenlock.

Mining companies have the opportunity to take responsibility here and protect our river from damage and work with us to manage the land.

The Queensland Government has nominated our river for wild river listing, which would prevent destructive development near rivers and waterholes, and keep water extraction to a low level. We support this protection idea, but mining companies should not be exempted from it.

We ask those mining companies who threaten the Wenlock River to consider the strong culture, people, Stories and values of these rivers before strip mining here. We also ask that our people are recognized and supported to look after the river for all Australians.

David Claudie
Northern Kaanju Traditional Owner
Chairman, Chuulangun Aboriginal Corporation