

To:
Minister for Natural Resources and Water
C/- Wild Rivers Coordinator
Department of Natural Resources and Water
Level 3 William McCormack Place
5 B Sheridan St Cairns

From:
The Council of Church Elders
Aurukun Uniting Church Congregation
Kang Kang St
Aurukun QLD

17th November 2008

Dear Minister,

We the concerned Elders of the Uniting Church Congregation of Aurukun, on behalf of the concerned members of the Parish and other concerned members of the wider Aurukun community, would firstly like to thank you for the opportunity you have given us to respond to the Wild Rivers Proposal for our Archer River and Archer Basin. It is of great comfort to us that there are people within the Queensland Government who care deeply about the preservation of our beautiful rivers and wetlands and who also want to listen to indigenous voices speaking out about important issues that effect our indigenous life so profoundly.

The overwhelming majority of our people have heard virtually nothing about the Wild Rivers Legislation or the proposals for the Archer River and Basin until very recent conversations with local people who have recently spoken with visitors from the State Government Department of Natural Resources and Water . The general consensus to come out of these conversations is that legislation and proposals that support the ongoing health of healthy ecosystems for our native plants and animals and our traditional hunting and fishing activities, "clean and green" economic activities such as eco-tourism and cultural tourism, and important social and spiritual values, can only be good for the heart and spirit of the Wik peoples of Aurukun.

The positive and hopeful responses of the people to the Wild Rivers Legislation and proposal for our beloved Archer River and Basin turn to fear, suspicion and deep concern, however, when it is pointed out to us that the very extensive legislation (which is difficult for our people to read and understand) contains a startling exemption clause in the middle of it which effectively says that the massive Aurukun Bauxite Project does NOT have to abide by the legislation. Our concern is even further exacerbated when we notice that the Indigenous summary guide (also difficult to read) that was brought in by the people from the Department of Natural Resources and Water for the purpose of consultation with the people contains no mention of this worrying exemption clause, nor did the people from the Department of NRW make any mention of this most disturbing part of the legislation.

The Elders submit to the Minister that for the Wild Rivers Legislation to be effective in protecting the pristine Archer River and Basin in the face of an unprecedented

threat from mining then the mining project must come under the full power of the intent and purpose of the legislation with no exemptions or concessions. In other words, if the Aurukun Bauxite project goes ahead it must not compromise the pristine qualities of the Archer River and surrounding wetlands.

The timeless beauty and profound significance of our rivers and wetlands are precious gifts from the Eternal Spirit to the People of this land for the purpose of feeding, nurturing and sustaining the freedom of our children, the dignity of our minds and the strength of our spirits. Bauxite mines can give money, but clean, pure rivers and wetlands give life. For thousands of years the Wik peoples to the North and to the South of the Archer River have cherished this gift of life and feel most strongly about our responsibility to ensure that future generations can continue to enjoy the bounty and mysteries of our place on this earth, beside the Archer River, in peace and harmony with the Eternal Spirit. To relinquish these responsibilities to the destructive forces of mining for short term financial gain would be a betrayal of our hearts and an invitation to spiritual sickness and death to destroy our culture, community and future.

We implore the Minister to revoke the exclusion clause in the Wild Rivers legislation to ensure that the mining project is also subject to the requirements of the Law and its aim of protecting the rivers and wetlands of the Archer Basin. We can also hope that one day the mining company and the State Government can come to appreciate fully that large amounts of money will never be a substitute for the True Spirit of Life.

Thank you for receiving our submission,

Yours faithfully,

Reverend Silas Wolmby

Pastor Ralph Peinkinna

Elder Rebecca Wolmby

Elder Pat Pootchemunka

Elder Caroline Peinkinna

Elder Anne Woolla

On behalf of all the concerned Elders and members of the Aurukun Uniting Church.