

Attention: News Editor/Chief of Staff

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Disappointment after Aboriginal Minister labels Aboriginal leader ‘petulant’

- Wintawari Guruma Aboriginal Corporation Chairman Glen Camille disappointed at being labeled petulant
- The comments reflect a surprising lack of knowledge around Aboriginal heritage by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs

The Wintawari Guruma Aboriginal Corporation (WGAC) is extremely disappointed in recent comments made by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, which labeled its CEO as petulant.

The comments were made in response to WGAC claims that the State Government made a premature, ill-informed and irresponsible decision to approve the destruction of 50 sites in a sacred area without considering information from traditional owners.

Please attribute the following comments to Wintawari Guruma Aboriginal Corporation CEO Glen Camile.

“For a State Government Minister to characterise an Aboriginal leader as petulant for acting in a responsible and reasonable manner is extremely disappointing. This comment perpetuates a negative stereotype that Aboriginal people are childish, immature and emotional and aren’t able to play by the white-fella rules. It is insulting and degrading.”

“Is the Minister feeling the pressure because he now realises that his Department has bungled its process? Or is he trying to deflect the attention from the fact that the Government has essentially outsourced their heritage protection responsibility to FMG?”

“The Minister comments that ‘one party is always disappointed’ and his reference to the State’s decision not to proceed with development of the Aurora Ranges is also a clear attempt to deflect.”

“From the outset, the WGAC has been clear that it is not against the mining activity. We have simply asked that FMG’s current expansion have consideration for our cultural heritage places. This involves the realignment of 2% of the proposed railway. There need not be a disappointed party here.”

“WGAC has engaged fully and properly with the process that exists under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act*. Through letters and meetings, WGAC has tried to ensure that the Department and the Minister were kept fully informed on the matter.”

“We have engaged with the system and the system has patently failed. I call on the Minister to explain why our efforts to follow proper process and protect our heritage are labeled as “petulant and offensive”.

“The Minister’s comments are way out of line. At this time, a public apology from the Minister is appropriate.”

Background:

Section 18 application

In May 2017, FMG applied to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs for consent to destroy 50 Eastern Guruma heritage sites within the Spear Hill area, despite requests from traditional owners for more time to consider the impacts to this important area. These sites included rockshelters, storage places, quarries and living areas. All these sites are in the foothills of Spear Hill, and define the Spear Hill area of significance.

Section 18 applications are considered by the ACMC who in turn provide advice to the Minister on whether a consent should be issued. In their application, which was considered by the ACMC in July 2017, FMG did not disclose that the 50 cultural material sites were connected to Spear Hill.

Section 16 application

In response to FMG's s18 application, WGAC applied to the Registrar for Sites for permission to excavate 14 of the 50 sites to determine their importance and significance including how old they are.

On the advice of the Minister's advisory body (the ACMC), the Registrar issued a Permit to undertake investigative work on 10 of these sites and stipulated that a report detailing the findings be provided by 30 November 2017. The purpose of the report was to inform the Minister's consideration of the s18 application to destroy 50 sites.

Following the excavations and cultural evaluation by the Eastern Guruma people in October 2017, WGAC applied for an extension to the report date to accommodate the laboratory analysis being undertaken. The Registrar set a new condition on the Permit to provide the report by 1 March 2018.

Minister decision

On 30 November 2017, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs decided to grant consent to FMG to destroy the 50 sites within the Spear Hill area.

The consent was issued while the s16 permit was still in force and before the report was finalised.

That is, the report requested by the ACMC and the Registrar, that would provide further information on cultural significance of the sites according to the Eastern Guruma Elders and detail the findings of the excavations, cannot ever be considered by the State Government in its decision-making process.

The report findings

The s16 report was recently completed by the Eastern Guruma traditional owners with the assistance of independent archaeologists. The report details the significant cultural heritage value of the sites under threat and includes radiocarbon results that prove that the area has been intensively used and occupied by Ancestral Guruma people for a minimum of 23,000 years.

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