



MEDIA RELEASE

To: News Editor
From: Uniting Church Synod of WA
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Call for protection of Aboriginal heritage sites

The Uniting Church WA calls on the State and Federal Governments to protect ancient Aboriginal heritage sites by reforming Aboriginal Heritage Acts, in close consultation with Traditional Owners. They also called for Traditional Owners and knowledge holders to retain access and control over Aboriginal Heritage sites.

The decisions were made at the 44th Annual Meeting of the Synod of WA where more than 150 Uniting Church members from around Western Australia came together to discuss issues of importance in the life of the Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Western Australia, and the wider community this weekend, Friday 11 to Sunday 13 September.

The recent demolition of the Juukan Gorge, an ancient Aboriginal heritage sight, by Rio Tinto has again highlighted the inadequacy of the Aboriginal Heritage Act.

Rev Robert Jetta, Chair of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress WA (Congress), said that it is difficult to explain the impact of the loss of sacred sites.

“The sad truth is, we the Aboriginal people, have so often felt like strangers in our own land, yet we are the First Peoples. So many parts of our culture, our lives and our voice have been broken and destroyed by the ‘progress’ of the colonisers. Our people are strong and we are still here holding onto our culture, but things like this – it still hurts.”

Together, the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress WA (Congress) and the Uniting Church WA grieve the loss of these artefacts that tell the stories and hold the history of Aboriginal people and their culture over tens of thousands of years.

The State Government have signalled their intention to reform the Act and have recently released the draft legislation for consultation, but there are concerns that other sites may be destroyed while consultations are ongoing.

The Uniting Church WA calls for the fast-tracking of this reform. This is not intended to short-cut consultations, but a call to prioritise the legislation’s passage through Parliament and ensure the protection of sites still at risk.

Susy Thomas, the newly installed Moderator of the Uniting Church WA, said not enough is being done to protect these important and sacred sites.

“The Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972 was put in place to protect and manage Aboriginal Heritage sites in Western Australia, but there have been numerous examples of Aboriginal Heritage sites in WA being threatened or impacted by industry,” she said.

“Why weren’t these places protected under the Act? It needs to be reformed as a matter of priority.”

Ends

*For media enquiries and interviews, please contact
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