

MEDIA RELEASE

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Gumala Aboriginal Corporation
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Western Australia

\$1 MILLION GOVT FUNDING APPROVAL PAVES THE WAY FOR MASSIVE TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT AT KARIJINI NATIONAL PARK

Gumala Aboriginal Corporation (GAC) is pleased to announce that it has been awarded \$1 million from the WA State Government - through the Government's Royalties for Regions program – which will help fund a strategic \$1.6 million infrastructure project at the majestic Karijini National Park.

The project will consist of the construction of a state-of-the-art cultural amphitheatre and dorm-style accommodation units at Karijini Eco Retreat, which is located in the heart of the world famous Karijini National Park. The Gumala group, which directly / indirectly employs over 400 staff and is now one of Australia's largest Indigenous corporations, operates the tourist award-winning Karijini Eco Retreat in cooperation with the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM).

The announcement of the awarding of the State Government funding to GAC was made on June 23 by Hon. Brendon Grylls, Minister for Regional Development, as part of the Pilbara Revitalisation Plan Phase Two.

Gumala Aboriginal Corporation's Chief Executive, Steve Mav, said he was extremely appreciative of the support GAC had received from Hon. Brendon Grylls and the Liberal-National Government regarding GAC's Education and Cultural Amphitheatre Vision.

“Karijini Eco Retreat is the jewel in the crown in terms of eco-tourism in Australia. This funding announcement represents a significant achievement for Gumala Aboriginal Corporation (GAC) and its associated enterprises. GAC has recently undertaken major reforms, and the fact that the Traditional Owners have made a commitment to further invest in this iconic eco tourism business is testament to the success of those reforms. Gumala's tourism business was originally initiated as an additional strategy to improve the long-term benefits to the Traditional Owners, so this announcement significantly enhances that cause.

“I would like to take this opportunity to thank Minister Grylls for supporting investment in the Pilbara and surrounding communities, including the Traditional Owners. This is a wonderful thing to happen – and it is in line with GAC strategic growth plan as one of Australia's largest Indigenous corporations, with a membership base of over 1200 Traditional Owners. I am also delighted that the Traditional Owners have the opportunity to expand their iconic tourism business at Karijini.

“I am proud to have taken part in the hard work that was required to achieve this funding outcome, and I am elated that the success story at Karijini will continue. The long term future of Karijini National Park and Karijini Eco Retreat is assured, and we look forward to the continuing flow of local and international tourists that come to visit Karijini National Park – a spectacular, truly unique natural treasure.

“Karijini Eco Retreat is part of the social fabric of the Tom Price and Paraburdoo communities, so I would like to thank these communities for being part of the growth of Karijini Eco Retreat by providing support to the tourism business.”

THE EDUCATION AND CULTURAL AMPHITHEATRE VISION

The Education and Cultural Amphitheatre Vision has two aspects, both of which would effectively attract school groups to Karijini National Park to bask in its natural wonder and learn about Australian Aboriginal culture from relevant Indigenous leaders.

Steve Mav: “Once built, the new state-of-the-art 140-seat cultural amphitheatre at Karijini Eco Retreat will offer visitors the incentive to expand their stay beyond a short over-night stay to an extended day immersive experience.

“The second aspect is to tap into the education/tourism niche by building six 8-bed dorm style accommodation units that can accommodate school groups wanting to learn and experience remote, regional Australia.

“During school holidays, this new accommodation option also offers us the exciting opportunity of catering to the exponentially expanding ‘flashpacker’ market – that is, providing a more comfortable standard of accommodation to travellers looking for a higher quality experience than normal backpacking without sacrificing the authenticity of their experience.”

COMMENTS FROM KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Karijini National Park is located within the traditional heartland of Banyjima country (Banyjima is one of the three language groups that GAC represents). Banyjima Elder and GAC Board Deputy Chairman, Archie Tucker, said: “Securing the Royalties for Regions funding for the cultural amphitheatre and accommodation facility represents a landmark moment for the Banyjima people and for Karijini National Park. The announcement of the awarding of the funding has left me lost for words. It is a wonderful opportunity for the Traditional Owners, their children, and future generations that follow.”

GAC Board Director (representing the Banyjima language group), Karen Tommy, said: “The project will assist with passing on the knowledge of our culture to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in that the Elders will now have a facility where they can pass on their culture to their children, and with international tourists coming through the park we can educate the world about Aboriginal culture. An important associated spin-off will be the creation of job opportunities for the Traditional Owners in their traditional lands.”

Another key stakeholder in Karijini Eco Retreat is Hospitality Group, through its subsidiary, the eco retreat management company Ecomodation. Hospitality Group’s Chairman, Chris Pye, described the announcement as “a great day for the eco tourism sector of the WA tourism industry and for Indigenous tourism in particular.

“We are excited to see the Liberal/National Party Government’s Royalties for Regions program supporting the construction of much needed and significant tourism infrastructure in this beautiful but remote region by a leading Aboriginal corporation.

“This shows that the process advocated by Tourism WA which involves the tourism operators working with their local development commissions to access important infrastructure spending contributions from Government has the potential to be successful if the operators and the development commissions work together on landmark projects like the Karijini Eco Retreat.

“The original concept is the brainchild of Gumala Aboriginal Corporation’s Steve Mav and we believe that it will add a new dimension to the Indigenous tourism opportunities offered in the Pilbara and make the tourism award-winning Karijini Eco Retreat even more competitive on the world stage.

“The project will provide more jobs for the local Indigenous people and more opportunities for education so that we can build a better understanding in our communities of the Indigenous culture and their love of and respect for the land.

“The facilities to be constructed at the Karijini Eco Retreat via this program will allow Hospitality Pty Ltd to offer new tourism and educational products to our local, domestic and international clients so that we might further develop the tourism industry in the Pilbara so that there might be a bright long term future for the local people which is not solely dependent on mining iron ore.

“This initiative requires that Gumala Aboriginal Corporation spend a significant amount of their own money as well, so that the Karijini Eco Retreat will become even more competitive in the growing world- wide eco tourism business given its location inside the magnificent Karijini National Park and the natural beauty of the gorges that surround it.

“We would like to acknowledge the support of the Department of the Environment and Conservation and the Pilbara Development Commission as well as the Royalties for Regions Program for this important initiative.”

ABOUT KARIJINI

Situated in the dynamic Pilbara region of Western Australia, the Karijini National Park is located just north of the Tropic of Capricorn, approximately 1400 km north of Perth and approximately 80 km north-east of Tom Price. Karijini National Park is the second largest national park in WA and is ranked in the top five visitor experiences for the State.

Since its grand opening in 2007, Karijini Eco Retreat has grown in sales and prominence to become one of the most outstanding tourism brands in WA. It has contributed to the wider local community and Traditional Owners and has offered employment, a place of training and instilled a sense of pride in local residents of the Pilbara region of Western Australia.

Karijini Eco Retreat awards:

- *Silver Medal Winners in the 2009 WA Tourism Awards (Indigenous Tourism Category).
- *2009 Australian Hotels Association Award for Excellence in the category of WA's Best Tourism Initiative.
- *Gold Medal Winners in the 2008 WA Tourism Awards (Ecotourism Category).
- *Silver Medal Winners in the 2008 WA Tourism Awards (Indigenous Tourism Category).
- *Bronze Medal Winners in the 2008 WA Tourism Awards (Unique Accommodation Development Category).
- *2008 Australia's North West Tourism Award - New Product Development.
- *Gold Medal Winners in the 2007 WA Tourism Awards (New Tourism Development Category).
- *WA Tourism Council Trust The Tick Accreditation.
- *Advanced Eco Tourism Certified.
- *AAA Tourism Green Star Accredited.

ABOUT GUMALA

Gumala Aboriginal Corporation (GAC) is the seventh largest Indigenous corporation in Australia and the largest indigenous corporation in the Pilbara region of Western Australia. GAC is headquartered in Tom Price, within close proximity to the picturesque and world famous Karijini National Park.

Created in 1996 to negotiate the Yandi Land Use Agreement, which was the first major land use agreement to be signed in Australia, GAC is a member-based organisation (current membership : approximately 1200 Traditional Owners).

In 1996, the Nyiyapali, Banyjima and Innawonga peoples negotiated and signed a historical Yandi Land Use Agreement with Hamersley Iron Pty Ltd (a wholly-owned subsidiary of Rio Tinto). Gumala Aboriginal Corporation was created to represent the collective interests of the Traditional Owners in the negotiations with Hamersley Iron and to develop and sign the Agreement.

The Agreement was the first major land use agreement to be signed in Australia. It enabled Hamersley Iron to proceed with developing the Yandicoogina mine, located on the Hamersley Ranges of the Pilbara region (Banyjima, Innawonga and Nyiyapali traditional lands). Gumala Aboriginal Corporation's head office in Tom Price is located approximately 120km west of the Yandicoogina mine.

The Agreement ensures that the following benefits will be delivered to the Banyjima, Nyiyapali and Innawonga people for the life of the mine and beyond:

- Education, training and employment opportunities and initiatives
- Support for pastoral station operations
- Heritage protection work
- In-kind assistance for community development
- Business development
- Community development
- Health and well-being programs

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND/OR REQUEST FOR IMAGES IN HIGH RESOLUTION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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