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Traditional Owners Call for Fitzroy River Protections

The Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council that represents the Native Title Holders and Registered Native Title Claimants of the Fitzroy River today called on the State Government to work with Traditional Owners to co-design a river buffer zone to protect the National Heritage Listed Fitzroy River.

The Council are very concerned about the figure of 600 Gigalitres for water extraction from the Fitzroy Catchment that has been discussed at a recent stakeholder forum.

“The buffer zone is about a sustainable water development approach and changing the conversation from being about what we can take from the river, to first discussing what we need to protect to keep it healthy,” said Chair Dr Anne Poelina.

The river buffer zone concept was first endorsed by Traditional Owners in 2016 in the Fitzroy River Declaration.

The Fitzroy River Declaration calls for the buffer zone to protect from all new mining, oil and gas, irrigation and dams. The Council today endorsed a position that the definition of dams should include both instream dams, weirs and barrages; and off-stream storage dams and tanks filled from the extraction of water from the river or capture of water from overland flows. Access to water for communities and stock water bores would continue.

Today’s announcement includes a map endorsed by the Council as a minimum boundary for the buffer zone to protect the National Heritage listed floodplains. The buffer zone covers just 9% of the catchment but protects 90% of the floodplains. Defining the final buffer zone boundaries would be part of the discussions around a water allocation plan for the Fitzroy River.

“The Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council believes that we can have a good sustainable development and protection scenario for the Fitzroy River Catchment that is a win-win for all stakeholders, but it must start with ensuring sustainable life and livelihoods for people along with the health of the river and protecting the cultural and environmental values that have been recognized as part of the National Heritage of Australia,” said Dr Poelina.

The Fitzroy River along with its floodplains and a number of water holes and wetlands were National Heritage Listed in 2011 as an outstanding example of cultural stories that are closely linked to the river.

‘Western Australia should be managing and celebrating the National Heritage values of the river and promoting them to grow economic benefits and jobs in the Fitzroy Catchment,’ said Dr Poelina.

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