

YMAC news

News from Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation

ISSUE 26 | FEBRUARY 2015

country
culture
people
future



Traditional Owners gather at Parliament House to send a message

Full story pages 3-5



Yamatji Marlpa
ABORIGINAL CORPORATION

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Please be aware that this issue contains a photo with deceased people on page 8. We apologise if this causes any distress.

Hello and Welcome



Pilbara Co-Chair Mrs Doris Eaton

Hello and welcome to the 26th edition of YMAC News, the newsletter of Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation. We have been celebrating the 20th anniversary of YMAC as a native title representative body, and the launch of our commemorative book looking back over our first 20 years of operations. While it is important to take some time to look back at what we have achieved, we haven't stopped moving forward in our work to protect Country and secure rights for Traditional Owners.

In this issue, you can read about what we have been doing to continue fighting for better Aboriginal heritage protection from the State Government, by bringing together an historic delegation to Parliament made up of Traditional Owners from all over WA.

We also hope that 2015 will bring more native title determinations for the people



Yamatji Co-Chair Mr Ben Roberts

of the Yamatji and Pilbara regions.

The Annual Regional Meeting for the Yamatji region was held in Denham in November and resulted in some new members of the Yamatji Regional Committee and the Board of Directors. Ben Roberts was elected Co-Chair of the Board of Directors and looks forward to continuing his work with YMAC in this new role. On page 11 you can read profiles of two more Board members, Deborah Oakley and Terry Jaffrey.

This issue also includes great stories about communities using native title to help them achieve their goals, as well as a bit of history about a very important time in our past, the Pilbara strike of the 1940s.

We hope you enjoy this issue of YMAC News.

Traditional Owners unite to protect heritage



YMAC Co-Chair Mrs Doris Eaton presents Ben Wyatt MLA with a petition

In November, over 70 Traditional Owners representing each region of Western Australia converged on Parliament in an historic show of solidarity against the State government's proposed amendments to the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972* (AHA).

The delegation voiced their concerns and presented a petition signed by over 1600 concerned community members to Hon Brendon Grylls MLA and Ben

Wyatt MLA. Ten representatives were also able to meet with Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Hon Peter Collier MLC. YMAC Co-Chair and respected Njama Elder, Doris Eaton, urged the Minister to remove the proposed Amendment Bill and begin a meaningful consultation process.

"This is the first time we've met with Minister Collier to discuss these proposed changes. The Heritage Act

should be protecting Aboriginal culture and heritage. Our heritage must be treated with the same respect as Built heritage, not weakened for industry to destroy it.

"This delegation of Traditional Owners is here to show the government we are united, and speak with one voice. We will not remain silent as our land, Country and sacred sites are ruined," said Mrs Eaton.

continues on page 4

United to protect heritage

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Simon Hawkins, YMAC CEO, said most of the delegation travelled huge distances from around Western Australia and included representatives from Kimberley, Pilbara, Western Deserts, Midwest, Murchison Gascoyne, Goldfields and South West.

“The diversity of this delegation shows that Traditional Owners want to be heard when it comes to issues that affect their cultural heritage. We’ve also had signatures coming in from around Australia, so it’s not just WA people who are concerned. In light of the seriousness of this issue to Aboriginal people and the effort so many people made to come to Parliament it was disappointing that neither the Premier nor the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs attended the gathering.

“Today the minister made a commitment to discuss alternative wording, to ensure the legislation empowers Aboriginal people, and also to give opportunity to discuss this wording before it is presented to Parliament. We look forward to these discussions,” said Mr Hawkins.

“We will not remain silent as our land, Country and sacred sites are ruined”

- Doris Eaton, YMAC Co-Chairperson



Glen Colbung, Deputy Chair of the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council, addresses the crowd at Parliament House

For more information go to:
www.aboriginalheritage.net.au
or call your local YMAC office.



Some of the many elders who came to Parliament House in November

Traditional Owners ignored

Despite optimism following the delegation, the Aboriginal Heritage Amendment Bill 2014 was introduced into State Parliament just one week later, without any of the changes requested by Traditional Owners.

Simon Hawkins said Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Peter Collier assured Traditional Owners at a recent meeting that the Bill would not go before Parliament until early 2015, after consultation with Traditional Owners.

"The changes will be detrimental to Aboriginal cultural heritage and the protection of sites. It will allow the CEO of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs to have the final say on site destruction. There has been no surety that Traditional Owners will be involved in these important decisions.

"I am disappointed that the Government has introduced the amendment Bill on the last sitting day of Parliament," says Mr Hawkins.

"Any amendments to the Aboriginal Heritage Act must include meaningful discussions with Traditional Owners. This has not happened."



Hon Brendon Grylls MLA addresses the crown after receiving the petition

YMAC celebrates a major milestone

December 2014 marked 20 years since YMAC became a representative body under the *Native Title Act*. In celebration of this milestone the Board of Directors proudly announced a new publication *Looking After Country: Our Mother, Our Provider and Keeper*.

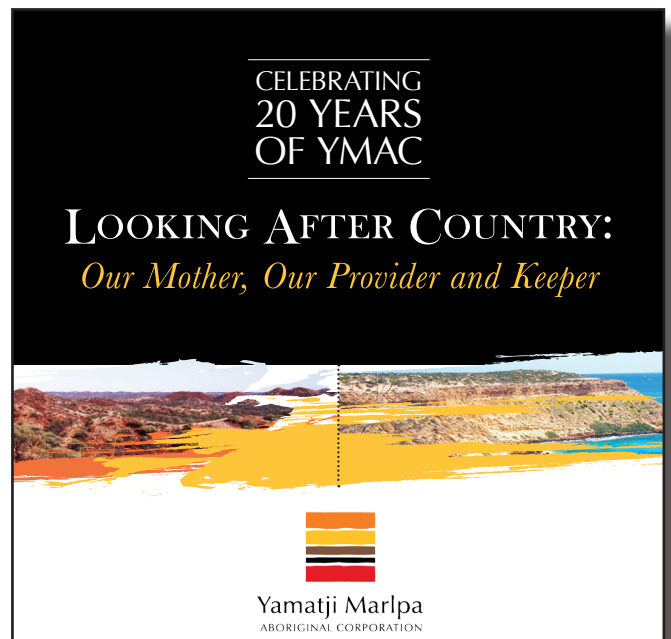
The book, which is rich with photos and interviews, provides an important record of the achievements of the organisation and the Traditional Owners of the the Murchison, Gascoyne and Pilbara regions of Western Australia.

YMAC Co-Chairperson Mrs Doris Eaton said the book is a retrospective on the organisation, how it has grown, and what it has achieved.

"It includes many voices of Traditional Owners who have been involved in the development of YMAC, from its very beginning at a meeting in the Pia Wadjari community, to the incorporation of the Pilbara operations with the Yamatji region, to recent native title determinations.

"It took us 20 years to get where we are but we've got more things to do. We want to see more determinations, we've got more to come."

To download your copy go to www.ymac.org.au.



The following is an extract from Looking After Country: Our Mother, Our Provider and Keeper

The early years

Several large meetings in 1993 led to the formation of an interim committee to establish a land council for the Yamatji region that would have the main aim of achieving recognition of native title rights for Yamatji Traditional Owners. A full Committee was elected at a meeting at Pia Wadjari, a remote Gascoyne community, in 1994. The organisation was incorporated under its Wajarri name Yamatji Barna Baba Maaja Aboriginal Corporation (YBBMAC). At that time the Aboriginal Legal Service also supported Yamatji people in the region.

At the Pia Wadjari meeting, Yamatji people expressed the strong hope that they would regain the use and benefit of land lost over generations.

They believed that if native title rights in the land were recognised in the Australian law, this would also open a way for Yamatji people to participate from a position of strength in a modern, diverse and rapidly changing regional economy.

In the Wajarri language, Yamatji means Aboriginal person; Barna means ground, dirt, sand, earth or Country; Baba means water and Maaja means boss. Together these words translate into Yamatji Land and Sea Council, which is one of the names the organisation has gone by.

Agreement brings opportunities for Carnarvon students

The Gnulli native title claimants have been seeing real benefits to their community through a schools based training program supported by Horizon Power and the Clontarf Academy in Carnarvon. After the Gnulli native title claimants and Horizon Power signed an agreement in 2011, YMAC worked with the parties to negotiate an Heritage Agreement Implementation Plan that would set down the details of how benefits would flow to the community.

The Implementation Plan includes funding for tuition, training and employment, as well as cultural awareness training for staff. The Gnulli native title claimants made it very clear that jobs and training were a priority.

In 2013, Paul Baron, a Gnulli Working Group member, together with a senior staff member from Horizon Power approached Clontarf Academy in Carnarvon with their idea of funding a schools-based training program for Aboriginal youths. This training program would offer the students a pathway to full-time employment, in line with the funding terms in the Agreement.

There are now four Aboriginal trainee students placed in

school-based traineeships with Dampier Salt, whilst enrolled with the Clontarf Academy and studying at the Carnarvon Community College. Once the students complete this training and their Year 12 studies, they will enter the Apprenticeship Program, which will lead to full-time employment once they successfully complete the program.

Angus Baillie, Director of the Clontarf Academy in Carnarvon, says this opportunity is pivotal for the Clontarf Academy.

“The boys can see the light of employment at the end of the tunnel and their younger peers are jumping on board and working harder as well.”

Mr Baillie went on to say: This initiative required a high level of skill and enterprise to get off the ground. It would not have been possible without the effort of the YMAC Compliance Officer (Michael Raj), Craig Deetlef from Horizon Power, Alan Perry from Dampier Salt and Paul Baron from Gnulli.

“It is a valuable role that should be continued so as to help the Aboriginal people YMAC represents take full advantage of similar future opportunities,” said Mr Baillie.



*School based trainees at Dampier Salt operations.
Photo courtesy of Clontarf Academy in Carnarvon*

Remembering the Pilbara Strike



'Pindan men', members of the Pilbara strike in Perth fighting a defamation case against the ABC in 1958. Photo: West Australian

The following is an extract from Looking After Country: Our Mother, Our Provider and Keeper, a YMAC publication celebrating 20 years as a Native Title representative Body. To read more go to ymac.org.au.

Political activism and collective organisation has been a feature of life for Aboriginal people in the Pilbara for many generations. We continue to be inspired by the leadership shown by elders in the early days, well before the native title system was introduced. The 1946 Pilbara Strike is a good example of this.

The first strike by Aboriginal people in Australia (and the longest strike in Australian history) began in the Pilbara in 1946, when pastoral workers walked off the stations in protest at low pay. Many workers were not paid at all, but

given rations of tea, flour, sugar and tobacco. Government policies enforced by station owners and police meant that the workers had no freedom to leave employment or travel elsewhere.

More than 800 workers left stations between 1946 and 1949 affecting about ten thousand square kilometres of sheep farming enterprise in the Pilbara. Some were forced to return to their work, but others sought new occupations and gained their independence. The strikers worked at collecting pearl shell from the Pilbara coast and collecting buffel grass

seed for sale to the pastoral industry. In 1948 they set up a mining company and staked claims around Port Hedland and Marble Bar. The strikers mined tin, beryl, tantalite and columbite and became self-sufficient.

The strike was first planned in 1942 by about 200 elders from 23 different groups but they agreed to wait until the War ended before taking action.

The start of the strike was then planned for 1 May 1946. Messages including calendars had been circulated in

the preceding months to facilitate coordinated walk-offs. Many of them gathered at different strike camps where they hunted, gathered bush tucker, skins and pearl shell and engaged in mining activities to provide food and money for supplies for all those people in the camps.

For many of the strikers, this was their first experience of economic independence, and it proved life-changing. Many of them never went back to the stations, and instead pursued these money-making activities until some families saved enough to purchase their own stations in the 1950s. Strelley Station, in Njamal Country, was one of those, and is still Aboriginal-owned today.

Many Aboriginal people were put in chains or jailed for their participation in the strike. Despite the danger they were in and the pressure they faced, the strike continued on until 1949.

Two of the key leaders of the movement, Ernie Mitchell and Peter Coppin, re-acquired the lease of the Yandeyarra Station in 1967 through negotiations with the government. A community and pastoral enterprise and an Aboriginal-run community was established there. Residents were explicit about the benefits of freedom and independence that had been opened up to them as a result of the strike.

The Pilbara strike paved the way for later protests and industrial action such as

the 1966 Gurindji strike that led to equal wages for Aboriginal Australians. The courage and determination of the men and women of the Pilbara who stood up for their human rights in the period 1946 to 1949 is an inspiration today to the many people who continue to pursue justice on their traditional homelands.

YMAC's Co-Chair Doris Eaton is the daughter of Ernie Mitchell, and Deputy Regional Manager Nyaparu (Margaret) Rose, Barry Taylor, Ian Taylor and Joanne Taylor are the children of Peter Coppin. They provide us with a tangible connection to the history of social justice and leadership with the strong activist role they have played in their communities for many years.



Descendants of the strikers pose at Parliament House to recreate the photo above left

Working together in heritage listed Country

The Wajarri Yamatji people have announced an agreement with iron ore miner Sinosteel Midwest Corporation Ltd. The Agreement is over Sinosteel's Weld Range project 70 kms northwest of the town of Cue in WA's Midwest.

The National Heritage Listed Weld Range is a not only a very significant area to the Wajarri Yamatji people, but also to the history of Western Australia. Sinosteel and the Wajarri Yamatji people agreed on exclusion zones around areas of particular importance, where Sinosteel has agreed never to mine.

Sinosteel has been exploring for resources in the area since 2006 under an exploration agreement made at that time. The mining agreement finalised this week has been in negotiation since 2009.

In addition to heritage protection, the agreement includes financial and non-financial benefits for the Wajarri Yamatji people, such as employment and contracting opportunities.

The Weld Range project has the potential to be one of the major projects serviced by the proposed Oakajee Port and Rail project.

Wajarri Yamatji community member and Chairperson of Meenangu Wajarri Aboriginal Corporation, Des Mongoo said it was a fantastic day for the whole Wajarri Yamatji community.

"As a Wajarri Yamatji person I was so proud for people to have

an opportunity to understand the agreement, say what they want to say, and be heard."

Sinosteel's General Manager, Phil Allsopp said the years of negotiation have resulted in an agreement that not only gives Sinosteel the basis for a viable mining project, but acknowledges and protects the many important heritage sites and cultural areas of Weld Range.

"I am proud that we have been able to reach an agreement that will define the way we work with the Wajarri Yamatji people in the areas of training, business and job opportunities, and heritage protection."

Simon Hawkins, CEO of YMAC said this agreement shows that mining and traditional uses of country can co-exist if parties are willing to listen and work cooperatively.

"These negotiations have been conducted sensitively over a period of several years and in this case, it was very important that Sinosteel took the time to listen to the concerns of the Traditional Owners and to offer very strong protections for the heritage values of the Weld Range.

"There are many sacred sites in the area that are important to Aboriginal people throughout the Midwest and beyond, as well as places that are still regularly used by Wajarri families today to carry on their traditions," he said.

Meet a YMAC director



Yamatji Board Member, Deborah Oakley

Deborah Oakley

Deborah is a Malgana woman. She currently works with the Carnarvon Aboriginal Medical Service and looks forward to using her skills and cultural knowledge during her work for the committee.

Country is very precious to Deborah's heart. For her, country goes way back ancestors long gone and now it's up to those who are here to respect what is left.

Deborah is very active. In her spare time she enjoys singing and dancing as well as playing basketball, football, softball and darts, and going fishing and swimming.



Pilbara Board Member, Terry Jaffrey

Terry Jaffrey

Terry is from the Western Shaw River and is a member of the Palyku claim group. He has a long relationship with YMAC and has been an active supporter of native title since 2006.

Terry was originally involved in the Woodstock Abydos Heritage Project located in the East Pilbara region in the traditional country of the Kariyarra and Palyku people. The area contains numerous sites of cultural and historical importance. After extensive work, this area is currently State Heritage listed. It is Terry's dream to have this area nationally recognised and eventually World Heritage listed.

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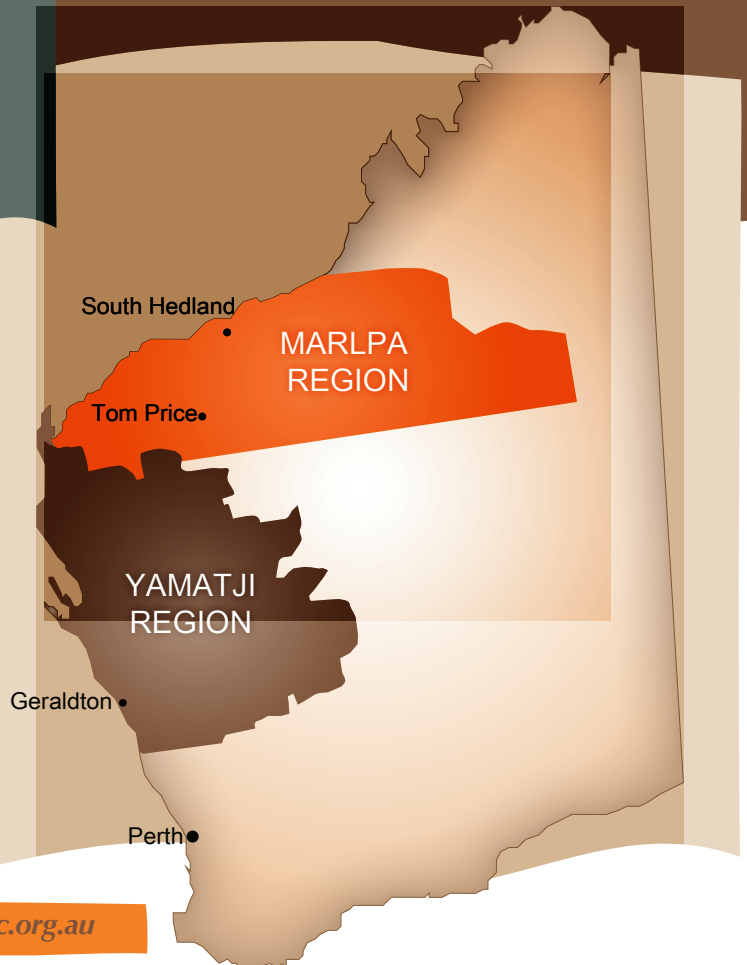
ABOUT US

YMAC News is produced by the Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation (YMAC).

We are the native title representative body for native title claims in the Murchison, Gascoyne and Pilbara regions of Western Australia.

We work with Yamatji and Marlpa (Pilbara) Aboriginal people to pursue:

- Recognition and acceptance of Yamatji and Marlpa culture in country
- A strong future for Yamatji and Marlpa people and country



Send your questions, ideas, letters or photos to editor@ymac.org.au

MEMBERSHIP

YMAC membership is open to all adult (18+ years) Yamatji and Marlpa people. Our membership also includes people who live in other areas but who have a traditional connection to Yamatji or Marlpa country.

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SERVICES

Our work includes:

- Providing legal representation and research to assist with native title claims
- Negotiating land use agreements
- Heritage protection services
- Community, economic and environmental projects

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