

Wajarri Yamatji Achieve Native Title Recognition

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Photo: Wajarri people proudly showing their consent determination

The Wajarri Yamatji community celebrates the legal recognition of their land and culture at an on-Country Federal Court hearing at Wooleen Station, held on Thursday 19 October 2017. The celebration was facilitated by Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation (YMAC), the Native Title Representative Body for the Murchison and Gascoyne Region.

The consent determination covers the majority of the Wajarri Yamatji claim area (68,743 square kilometres of the total 97,676 square kilometres). The area encompasses parts of the Shires of Meekatharra, Mount Magnet, Murchison, Upper Gascoyne, Cue and Yalgoo; as well as 56 pastoral leases.

The Wajarri Yamatji claim area is roughly 500 km wide, north to south and lies between the regional towns of Meekatharra, Cue, Yalgoo and just north of Mullewa. The area encompasses Mt Augustus (*Burringurrah*) and stretches of the Murchison and Gascoyne Rivers.

In 2009, the Wajarri Yamatji, the State of Western Australia and the Commonwealth government entered into the Murchison Radio-astronomy Observatory Agreement, which has led to the development of the Murchison Widefield Array and the Australian Square Kilometre Array (SKA) Pathfinder as SKA precursor telescopes.

The journey to this native title determination commenced in 1995 and has involved the coming together of many families to achieve native title recognition. The Wajarri people have inhabited their Country since time immemorial, and have continued to look after their Country. Through their culture and knowledge, Wajarri people have maintained a deep connection to their land that continues to be passed on through the generations.

The Wajarri Organising Committee stated, “This native title determination is a historic day for the Wajarri people. It recognises our connection to our Country (*barna*) that has existed since long before European colonisation. We have always known where we come from, but this determination means that our connection to our *barna* is recognised by Australian law. On this day, we’d like to pay our respects to Wajarri elders past and present, and our youth who carry the future of our Wajarri people with them.”

His Honour, Justice Griffiths said, “This is a historic day. After more than 20 years we gather together today at Wooleen Station to recognise the native title rights and interests of the Wajarri Yamatji in this land. I warmly congratulate everyone who has been involved in bringing this part of the native title claim to a positive outcome.”

Mr David Edelman, representing Hon. Ben Wyatt, Treasurer; Minister for Finance; Energy; Aboriginal Affairs, said “The Western Australian Government looks forward to building an enduring relationship with the Wajarri Yamatji people...and welcomes your engagement to discuss opportunities for economic development. I congratulate the Wajarri Yamatji people on your achievement.”

Mr Simon Hawkins, Chief Executive Officer of YMAC said, “There are many stakeholders involved in the native title process. On behalf of the Board of Directors and everyone at YMAC, I would like to acknowledge the State, the Federal Court, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, the National Native Title Tribunal, pastoralists, mining companies and all other parties for their cooperation and hard work over the past two decades to achieve this historic outcome. Congratulations everyone.”

Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation (YMAC) is the native title representative body for native title claims in the Pilbara, Murchison and Gascoyne areas of Western Australia. The organisation has a representative area over one-third of Western Australia and represents over 24 native title claims, all with their own language, culture and traditions.

YMAC is a not-for-profit organisation run by an Aboriginal Board. It provides a range of services to its members including claim and future-act representation, heritage protection services, community and economic development, and natural resource management.

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