

Wajarri Yamatji celebrate native title determination

MEDIA RELEASE: Monday 23 April 2018



Photo: Wajarri Yamatji native title holders celebrate their native title determination with Justice Griffiths

The Wajarri Yamatji community today celebrates the recognition of its second determination of native title (called the Part B Determination) by the Federal Court of Australia. This determination follows the Part A Determination that was made by the Federal Court in October 2017 over approximately 68,743 square kilometres of land and waters. The Part B Determination was made with the consent of respondent parties, including the State of Western Australia and the Commonwealth.

The Part B Determination recognised the native title of the Wajarri community over an area of approximately 12,252 square kilometres of land and waters in the Murchison and Gascoyne regions. It includes parts of the Shires of Upper Gascoyne, Murchison, Yalgoo, Meekatharra and Cue. The determination covers unallocated Crown land, Aboriginal-held pastoral leases and a number of Aboriginal reserves and communities.

Exclusive possession native title is recognised over an area of approximately 9,100 square kilometres, meaning that the Wajarri Yamatji community has the right of possession, occupation, use and enjoyment of these areas to the exclusion of all others. This area of exclusive possession is approximately equivalent to twice the size of the island of Bali.

The determination encompasses the Aboriginal communities of Burringurrah, Pia Wadjari and Buttah Windee, which many Wajarri people call home.

It also includes Wilgie Mia, located in the Weld Range near Cue. Wilgie Mia is the largest and deepest Aboriginal ochre mine in Australia, and was added to the National Heritage List in 2011 in recognition of its outstanding heritage value.

Wilgie Mia is of profound cultural importance as the site of a dreaming story about the marlu (red kangaroo) who was speared on the coast and came all the way to the Weld Range. The ochre found at Wilgie Mia is the blood of the *marlu*.

The Wajarri Yamatji Working Group stated, “This native title determination is an important day for the Wajarri people. It recognises our rights (including our exclusive rights) in our barna (Country) 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 land is recognised under Australian law. On this day, we’d like to pay our respects to Wajarri elders past and present for their tireless work in achieving this native title determination”

His Honour, Justice John Griffiths of the Federal Court said, “This is a proud occasion for the Wajarri Yamatji people. Everyone who has contributed to this consent determination and avoided the costly litigation process is congratulated and thanked for their efforts.”

Simon Hawkins, CEO of Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation said, “It’s been a long journey to achieving recognition for the Wajarri people. I congratulate the Wajarri people on successfully securing further recognition of their traditional rights and interests after two decades of perseverance and commitment. This would not be possible without the dedicated support of the YMAC team, the Federal Court and State representatives. I congratulate everyone on this achievement.”

All quotes from Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation to be attributed to Mr Simon Hawkins, CEO Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation.

About Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation

Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation (YMAC) is the native title representative body for the Pilbara, Murchison, Mid-West and Gascoyne regions of Western Australia. YMAC has a representative area of over one-third of WA 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 of Directors and 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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