



Gnulli native title group celebrates native title win

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Photo: Hon. Justice John Griffiths and Gnulli native title holders.

Photographer: MaryAnne Livsey

Yesterday's consent determination was a long time coming to achieve native title recognition for the Yinggarda, Baiyungu and Thalanyji people who form the Gnulli native title claim. It was an emotional occasion for many as they were formally recognised as the native title holders by the Federal Court over a combined determination area of 71,354 square kilometres.

The on-Country court hearing was held at Gwoonwardu Mia Gascoyne Aboriginal Heritage and Cultural Centre in Carnarvon. The Federal Court, representatives of the State and Federal governments, other parties and importantly, the Traditional Owners came together to witness this historic occasion.

The judgement by Hon. Justice John Griffiths means that the Native Title Holders will continue to have a role in looking after their Country through exercising their relevant procedural rights, such as the right to consultation, and the right to negotiate in relation to development in the determination area, including mining.

Justice Griffiths said, it was a momentous day that shows that the “Native Title Act is one of the most important pieces of legislation ever passed by the Commonwealth Government of Australia.

“This is a wonderful day for everyone involved, especially the Indigenous people who have shown such extraordinary patience and determination to achieve this outcome.

“I congratulate them all and reflect to acknowledge all the good work done by those who cannot be here today,” Justice Griffiths said.

The journey for the Yinggarda, Baiyungu and Thalanyji people to this determination began 22 years ago, with the initial claim (WC 1997/028) lodged with the National Native Title Tribunal on 14 April, 1997.

Traditional Owner Kath Ryan said, "This is a great day of achievement for our people, I'm filled with pride. I'm so please we are recognised as traditional owners and we should be respected as such."

Traditional Owner Hazel Walker said it was a very special day of recognition and celebration. “Native Title has brought the group together, it has been a long journey for us. Now it is time to take young people on Country to learn the journey of our Elders.”

The determination area encompasses several pastoral leases, mining tenements, roads and reserves as well as portions of the Kennedy Range and Cape Range National Parks, the Ningaloo Marine Park, Lake MacLeod, and waters in the Exmouth Gulf and the Ningaloo Marine Park.

While all Country is important to the native title holders, the determination area contains places of special significance, such as mythological and ceremonial sites and natural resources. The spiritual watersnake inhabits permanent waters within the determination area, and is known as *wanamangura* in Baiyungu and Thalanyji languages and *kajurra* in Yinggarda language. Both of these names were recorded in the early ethnographic literature, and today Yinggarda, Baiyungu and Thalanyji people still believe that the watersnake lives in the waters of their Country and that it created many pools and watercourses by its actions.

The Yinggarda, Baiyungu and Thalanyji people have also each maintained a physical presence in their respective part of the determination area since the acquisition of British sovereignty, and have a continuing physical or spiritual involvement in that area. This connection is still alive today and has not been severed.

Following the hearing, the Traditional Owners celebrated the recognition. The celebration was facilitated by Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation (YMAC), the Native Title Representative Body for the Yamatji Region.

Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation Chief Executive Officer Simon Hawkins congratulated the native title holders on securing their native title rights after such a long journey.

“It’s taken more than two decades of perseverance and commitment by the Yinggarda, Baiyungu and Thalanyji people to achieve this recognition. It’s great to now see them able to celebrate and enjoy this success as a community,” Mr Hawkins said.

“This would not be possible without the dedicated support of the YMAC team, the National Native Title Tribunal, State representatives and respondent parties. We are proud to have been the Native Title Representative Body working with the Yinggarda, Baiyungu and Thalanyji people, and the Federal and State governments, to see this day happen,” he said.

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



Yamatji Marlpa
ABORIGINAL CORPORATION



About Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation

Proudly celebrating its 25th Anniversary in 2019, 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 20 Traditional Owner groups - 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.

For interviews please contact: **Jane Mitchell**, Communications Manager, email editor@ymac.org.au mobile **0427 463 796**.