



Northern Land Council

MEDIA RELEASE

Tuesday 6 March 2001

Mabo, Wik and the Native Title Act under the spotlight

More than a dozen traditional Aboriginal owners have travelled from the north of Australia to Canberra to attend the start today of a crucial native title High Court appeal affecting their country.

This is the first time a native title claim over pastoral property has reached the High Court since Wik and the outcome will influence similar claims throughout Australia.

It will determine exactly what the Mabo and Wik decisions achieved for Aboriginal people.

The claim by the Miriwung and Gajerrong people covers more than 7,900 sq kms of land and water in the East Kimberley – including Keep River National Park in NT and, in WA, vacant Crown land and Aboriginal reserves, pastoral leases, former pastoral leases, part of the Argyle Diamond Mine lease, Lake Argyle and ohte rareas covered by the Ord Irrigation area, three sall islands and waters in the intertidal zone and mud flats.

While the initial native title trial in 1999 gave traditional owners substantial rights over the land, the subsequent Federal Court appeal overturned that decision and decided that much of the native title had either been extinguished or partially extinguished.

“This case will determine how easily our native title is extinguished and what native title really means,” Northern Land Council Chairman Mr Galarrwuy Yunupingu said.

The hearing is expected to last two weeks, and a decision may be handed down before the end of the year.