



Northern Land Council

MEDIA RELEASE

Indigenous sea rights given a top priority

5 April 2001

The Northern Land Council has called on all governments throughout Australia - Federal, State and Territory - to recognise Indigenous sea rights and cooperate with the proposed new National Indigenous Sea Council.

The Full Council of the NLC, involving about 80 representatives of regions throughout the Top End of the Northern Territory, today supported the establishment of the Indigenous Sea Council.

The meeting also supported the move for the Northern Alliance, involving Land Councils in north Australia and other Indigenous organisations across the north of Australia, to step up its action in pursuing Indigenous sea rights.

The Northern Alliance will begin by holding a sea rights conference within weeks to discuss all issues involving sea rights, including traditional rights, commercial fishing, sacred sites and maritime developments.

The NLC's intention is to invite all stakeholders involved in sea rights – such as amateur and commercial fishers and government departments – to make it a forum to work through these issues as a matter of priority.

The proposed National Indigenous Sea Council has stemmed from the recent Cultural Maritime Summit held on Thursday Island in March, and attended by Torres Strait Islanders from 22 islands in the area.

NLC Deputy Chair Mary Yarmirr, who attended to Summit was nominated by the Full Council as its representative on the new National Sea Council, along with Aboriginal representatives of the NT Fisheries Advisory Committees.

Mary Yarmirr is the principal applicant in the Croker Island native title case, which is a test case that will affect all sea claims throughout Australia. That case was heard in the High Court in February and its outcome, expected by the end of the year, is expected to determine whether or not Indigenous sea rights are recognised as being considered exclusive and commercial.