



Northern Land Council

MEDIA RELEASE

National companies use the Land Rights Act to work on Aboriginal land

Friday October 19, 2001

De Beers, Jurlique and Rio Tinto are among major national and international companies entering joint venture agreements with traditional Aboriginal landowners in the Northern Territory.

Cosmetic production, crabbing and diamond mining are among the diverse range of activities using Aboriginal land in the Top End that were approved this week by the Full Council of the Northern Land Council.

The list of seven exploration licences and 10 Land Use agreements were all negotiated using the Land Rights Act.

“Economic development is alive and well on Aboriginal land in the Territory, thanks to the Land Rights Act,” NLC Chairman Galarrwuy Yunupingu said today.

“The list of economic projects given the nod by traditional owners this week shows that the Coalition is really out of touch when they try to suggest in their Indigenous Policy document that the Land Rights Act is creating barriers to development.

“The information in the Policy document indicates some continuing confusion about the Land Rights Act and the Native Title Act and I suggest that improved communication and liaison with Indigenous organisations like the Northern Land Council might be a way towards more progress.

“The real barrier to letting Aboriginal people into economic development is negative attitudes.

“We hope the NT Economic Development Summit being held in Darwin in early November, and a new government in the NT, will help to tackle some of those entrenched negative attitudes and values at a Territory level.

“The latest batch of exploration and other land use agreements demonstrate that many companies are making this transition and getting a very positive response from traditional owners.”

Seven new exploration licences in the Timber Creek, Ngukurr and Borroloola regions, totalling more than 2300 square kilometres, were approved by the Full Council.

De Beers is involved in three licences just east of Gregory National Park near Timber Creek and another area near Borroloola.

2/..

Rio Tinto has entered joint venture agreements with traditional owners for two licences about 125 kilometres south-west of Timber Creek and an area close to Hodgson Downs in the Ngukurr region.

There is scope with all the joint ventures for some employment, training and contract work for Aboriginal people.

Major sacred sites will be identified before any exploration begins, to ensure they are excluded from activities, and employees will receive cross cultural training.

Jurlique’s business proposal is to harvest a fruit in the Maningrida region to make personal care products.

Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation, which is the outstations resource agency in the region, will collect and sell the fruit, *Morinda citriflora*, to Jurlique.

Other land use agreements approved at the Full Council meeting also include a sports fishing enterprise on Croker Island and two crabbing agreements at Blue Mud Bay in east Arnhem Land.

Telstra has also signed land use agreements for a radio repeater tower at Ramingining, a transmission tower at Nhulunbuy and a communications tower at Milingimbi.

Also among the 10 new Land Use agreements are two leases for YBE Pty Ltd at Nhulunbuy for sand extraction and a waste disposal site.

Mr Yunupingu said he was baffled by the mixed messages in references to the Land Rights Act and native title holders in the Coalition’s Policy document.

“There are no Coalition amendments to the Land Rights Act on the table that we know of, and there has been no extensive consultation with us over changes to the Act,” he said.

“On the contrary, the NLC itself has presented proposed amendments to the Act to the Coalition government which would further progress development opportunities on Aboriginal land – but there had been no response.

“If the Coalition is returned to government we look forward to their commitment to working in partnership with Indigenous Australians – an important step would be in fostering such partnerships with Indigenous institutions like the Land Councils. It is through Aboriginal peoples’ own institutions that the most effective targeted and viable longer-term outcomes can be achieved.