



Northern Land Council

MEDIA RELEASE

Urapunga handback 'a proud day' for Ngalakgan

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More than 1,800 square kilometres of land has been handed back to Traditional Owners at a ceremony held today in the Roper Valley region in the Northern Territory.

Urapunga Station, approximately 600 kilometres south-east of Darwin, has been returned to six local descent groups of the Ngalakgan people, including Burdal, Goyal, Mambali and Murrungan representatives. The occasion marks the end of a 30-year quest by Traditional Owners to regain control of their ancestral lands.

"It's a great day, a proud day for the Ngalakgan," Northern Land Council Chairman Galarrwuy Yunupingu said. "Traditional Owners began pressing for the return of their land in the 1970s, and now, after more than 30 years of patience, it's finally come back to them."

"The Ngalakgan have ancient connections to their land, and despite the arrival of Europeans in the early 1870s, they have continued to retain their cultural links and ceremonies."

"Like so many others, the Ngalakgan faced a variety of obstacles in the fight for their country, particularly from the former NT Government."

Traditional Owner David Daniels welcomed the handback but said it had come at a price.

"It's good that we have this land back, we have been fighting for a long time for this land. I am sorry that so many of the old people who started this fight have passed away," Mr Daniels said.

Financial assistance from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission allowed the NLC to buy Urapunga in 1996. Since then the station has been held in trust for Traditional Owners pending the outcome of the land claim made under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act on 12 November 1996.

Land Commissioner Justice Olney ruled in favour of the claimants in June 2001, paving the way for today's handback. Justice Olney has identified approximately 1,200 people as Traditional Owners.

"The benefits of conversion to inalienable freehold title now provide the Ngalakgan with a host of options," Mr Yunupingu said.

Despite the station's neglected state at the time of purchase, the focus now is on securing a strong economic outlook for future generations and an NLC-backed assessment process is already well underway to identify appropriate opportunities.