



Northern Land Council

MEDIA RELEASE

Exploration approvals show up Ruddock claims

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A further five exploration licence applications in the Northern Territory's Arnhem Land region have been approved by the Northern Land Council's Full Council, demonstrating that mineral exploration continues to progress in the Top End despite recent comments to the contrary by Federal Aboriginal Affairs Minister Philip Ruddock.

NLC Chairman Galarrwuy Yunupingu today said the vote to endorse traditional owners' prior consent to the ELAs was a clear example of how Aboriginal people and mining companies were continuing to work together in spite of negative Federal Government attitudes to the NT's Aboriginal Land Rights Act.

"On the one hand you've got a Minister in Canberra saying that the Land Rights Act is holding up development," Mr Yunupingu said. "But the facts are you've got about 30 per cent of Aboriginal freehold land in the NLC's area currently under exploration, with further applications being regularly approved."

"Elsewhere in the Northern Territory the former CLP Government effectively froze applications to mine and explore on pastoral leases for four years from February 1996 in a pathetic attempt to undermine the Native Title Act. Even now, Land Councils are still processing the resulting backlog."

The unanimous decision to approve the five ELAs will see a further 1,827 square kilometres of land made available for exploration to some of the biggest mining companies operating in Australia, including Rio Tinto, BHP Billiton, De Beer's Australia and Cameco Australia.

All the companies have made commitments to traditional owners that sacred sites will be protected as well as putting in framework agreements for Aboriginal employment and royalties should exploration lead to the development of mines.

"The journey from exploration to mining is usually a long and expensive process for the companies involved and Land Councils understand that," Mr Yunupingu said. "Aboriginal people have demonstrated time and time again that we are not anti-development so long as our rights over ancestral lands are protected."