



# Northern Land Council

## MEDIA RELEASE

### Land returned to the Wagiman people

**Saturday 7 December 2002**

Northern Land Council Deputy Chairman John Daly today welcomed the return of traditional lands to the Wagiman people of Pine Creek under the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976.

At a ceremony held at Kybrook Farm 90 kilometres north of Katherine, the title deeds to 1,094 square kilometres of land in four separate blocks left outstanding from the original Upper Daly Land Claim were handed back to traditional owners by the Federal Minister for Indigenous Affairs, the Hon. Philip Ruddock.

The land handback, which was also attended by Aboriginal Land Commissioner Justice Howard Olney and ATSIC chief executive officer Wayne Gibbons, follows a series of extensive negotiations and meetings between the NLC and the former NT Government.

“Today’s hand-back is the culmination of many years of hard work and patience,” Mr Daly said. “Negotiations were conducted in a positive manner and the result is a win-win solution for all parties.”

“Traditional owners have now secured recognition and protection for country of high importance.”

As part of the settlement, the claimants withdrew their claim over a portion of land called “Stray Creek Block” and did not object to the NT Government compulsorily acquiring the Wagiman Native Title rights over Stray Creek Block and Douglas Station. In return, the Wagiman have secured Aboriginal freehold title for a portion of land known as “Sawmill Block.”

Though not part of the original Upper Daly Land Claim lodged in 1979, the Sawmill Block site is considered to be an important site to traditional owners, as it contains a variety of significant locations, including burial, birth, historical and dreaming sites.

“There is a very important men’s site located on that portion of land,” traditional owner Mr Paddy Huddlestone said. “While I am sad that many of the original claimants are no longer here to witness the outcome to this long struggle, it is nonetheless a very happy day for my people.”

The popular Umbrawarra Gorge Nature Park is also included in the claim area. However, it is to be converted to NT freehold and will be jointly managed as a park between the Wagiman and the NT Government.

Mr Daly said: “This is a clear example of just what can be achieved when governments are willing to sit down and talk with Aboriginal people and work towards a negotiated settlement.”