



# Northern Land Council

## MEDIA RELEASE

### Historic signing of native title pearling deal

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Traditional owners in the Croker Island/Cobourg Peninsula region of the Top End have today signed the Northern Territory's first seas-only native title pearling agreement with Broome Pearls Pty Ltd in a ceremony on Croker Island.

The four-year agreement clears the way for Broome Pearls to establish pearl farming operations free of native title concerns on three Crown leases over seabed near Valencia Island, in Mountnorris Bay and in Malay Bay. In return native title holders will have extra rights to ensure environmental and sacred site rules are upheld, and they will also be offered training and employment opportunities.

Croker Island traditional owner and Mandilarri elder Mary Yarmirr said the agreement flowed on from the High Court's 2001 Croker Island decision, which upheld the existence of native title rights over the sea and seabed in the Croker Island claim area.

"This is a terrific day for us," Ms Yarmirr said. "This is the first time a pearling company has recognised native title rights over sea country in the Top End."

"When I talk about sea country, I am not talking only about the waters of the sea. I am talking about the sea bed and the reefs, and the fish and animals in the sea, and our fishing and hunting grounds, and the air and clouds above the sea, and about our sacred sites and ancestral beings who created all the country."

"It is important that all this is protected and treated with respect, and I congratulate Broome Pearls for their recognition of our rights and traditions."

NLC Deputy Chair John Daly said the Land Council would continue to help traditional owners manage their relationship with Broome Pearls.

"The NLC has made economic independence for Aboriginal people in its area a top priority," he said. "This agreement delivers substantial opportunities for traditional owners living on their land and, hopefully, will serve as a model for similar agreements in the future."

M.G. Kailis Group, the parent company of Broome Pearls, has been operating in the Top End for more than 35 years. It currently operates a pearling base at Injina (Point David) on Croker Island with Tiwi Pearls.

Broome Pearls director Professor George Kailis said the company had always valued its relationships with traditional owners with a long record in this regard in the NT and Western Australia.

“Very early on in our negotiations we said we wanted a genuine partnership with traditional owners,” he said. “We want to be good neighbours, we want our business to prosper and we want traditional owners to share in the benefits of that business.”

“It gives me tremendous pleasure to be here today to witness the outcome of that process. The M.G. Kailis Group hopes that agreements based on understanding and mutual respect will become the norm for relations between fishing and aquaculture industries and Aboriginal communities.”