



Northern Land Council

Media Release

Traditional Owners Win Blue Mud Bay Case

30 July 2008

The Northern Land Council (NLC) Chairman, Wali Wunungmurra, has welcomed today's High Court decision confirming that traditional owners of the Blue Mud Bay region in north east Arnhem Land – together with traditional owners of the entire Northern Territory coastline - have exclusive rights regarding commercial and recreational fishing in tidal waters overlying Aboriginal land.

“We are overjoyed by this decision – it is a landmark victory for traditional owners – and we have waited for over 30 years for our sea rights to be legally recognised,” said Mr Wunungmurra.

“This means that there will now be consultations between traditional owners and all stakeholders to obtain a negotiated settlement which ensures commercial and recreational fishing in tidal waters over Aboriginal land.

“There will be a minimum 12 month amnesty in favour of the status quo to enable good faith negotiations to occur, with the current interim licensing scheme extended for that period.

“This scheme is free and involves the automatic grant of licences to commercial operators, with recreational licences automatically granted on request.”

The interim scheme was implemented in response to the Federal Court's decision in March last year in favour of traditional owners, and is administered by the NLC on behalf of the Anindilyakwa, Northern and Tiwi Land Councils.

“A negotiated outcome will mean that traditional owners around the Northern Territory's coastline can jointly participate in the management and development of a sustainable fishing industry – including the protection of fishing stocks, protection of sacred sites and participation in enterprises.

“Traditional owners have developed a constructive relationship with commercial and recreational fishing representatives over the last year, and the NLC looks forward to continuing that relationship and obtaining a win-win outcome for all Territorians,” Mr Wunungmurra said.

- **This decision applies to the intertidal zone of over 80% of the Northern Territory coastline, and also to tidal rivers overlying Aboriginal land.**
- **This issue has been raised by traditional owners since the Woodward Royal Commission in 1973, and has been raised in the Courts since the Croker Island case which was lodged in 1994.**

Ends.

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