



NORTHERN
LAND COUNCIL

MEDIA RELEASE

Our Land, Our Sea, Our Life

Native Title over Pine Creek finally recognised

Tuesday 9 April 2019

The Wagiman and Jawoyn Bolmo, Matjba and Wurrkbarbar groups were today recognised as the native title holders of the town of Pine Creek at a dedication ceremony held in the town, 20 years after the first claim was lodged.

More than 160 people gathered at Heritage Park, Pine Creek as Justice White recognised mostly exclusive native title in and around the town of Pine Creek, covering an area of approximately 12km². It was the first time the Federal Court has sat in Pine Creek.

NLC Chairman Samuel Bush-Blanasi said: “Congratulations to the native title holders on this historic achievement. It has been a long time coming. This is a great day for the Wagiman and Jawoyn Bolmo, Matjba and Wurrkbarbar people. Thank you to NLC staff and consultants for their hard work especially over the last three years, and in particular NLC lawyer David Spicer-Harden.”

George Jabul Huddleston, senior Wagiman Traditional Owner, and his brothers made some of the first claims to native title over Pine Creek. “It’s a really important thing. We like to get it back this country. I’m happy. For my mum and dad, my brothers I’m happy. Of my four brothers, I am the only one left. I went four times for hearings to give evidence. I am happy to get back the land. I am happy now,” he said.

Senior Jawoyn Wurrkbarbar woman Bessie Coleman said: “On behalf of the three clan groups, Jawoyn Bolmo, Matjba and Wurrkbarbar, and the Wagiman, it took us 20 years, but we finally got it.”

“All the years I grew up in this town we had no voice. We finally got there. I learnt a lot from the senior women and men. They started it off. We finished it off.”

Mick Markham, Jawoyn elder, said the decision would bring certainty for the future of the town. “Thank you to our elders who fought this for 20 years. They started this. And it’s a special day of remembrance for them. This determination will free up a lot of the blocks here. People from the communities can move in and buy a block, and live in this town,” he said.

For the claimants and their families, the resolution of their native title claim over Pine Creek is an important milestone for three reasons.

Firstly, it recognises the traditional ownership of the Town of Pine Creek by the Wagiman people and the Jawoyn Matjba, Bolmo and Wurrkbarbar through their shared connection to the land upon which we meet today.

Secondly the determination recognises the native title claimants always had, and still have, a special relationship with, and traditional rights in, the land and waters of the claim area.

Thirdly it provides the native title claimants with an opportunity to have input into any future uses of their country. It is also significant for the children and grandchildren of those persons who will carry this legacy into the future.

Exclusive possession native title is the highest recognition capable under Australian property law, giving Wagiman and Jawoyn Bolmo, Matjba and Wurrkbarbar native title holders the same rights as private land owners. Existing roads and private land will not be affected by the determination.

The first native title claim over Pine Creek was lodged in 1999.

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