



NORTHERN
LAND COUNCIL

MEDIA RELEASE

Our Land, Our Sea, Our Life

Critical milestone approaches for Blue Mud Bay

18 November 2022

The end of December 2022 marks a significant milestone implementing the Blue Mud Bay Action Plan following the historic 2008 High Court decision.

“Traditional Owners have been very patient,” Chairman of the Northern Land Council, Samuel Bush-Blanasi said. “It’s been more than 14 years since the High Court decision. I don’t know if most people would be that generous in waiting for their legal rights to be recognised.”

Open access arrangements are already in place for areas where the vast majority of recreational fishing takes place, including around Darwin, Bynoe and around Nhulunbuy.

Northern Land Council CEO, Joe Martin-Jard, noted there are still some claims over intertidal zones and the beds and banks for rivers remaining to be finalised, but most of these have already been fully investigated by the Aboriginal Land Commissioner, the Hon John Mansfield AM QC. This includes his recent report on the Woolner / Mary River region land claim and his 2019 Report on Review of Detriment: Aboriginal Land Claims Recommended for Grant but not yet Finalised.

“Justice Mansfield’s reports give a detailed examination of the potential impact of land claims on stakeholders like recreational fishers. After considering detailed submissions from stakeholders including AFANT, the NT Government and NLC, the Aboriginal Land Commissioner recommended the grants should be made,” said Mr Martin-Jard.

The final decision on land claims rests with the Minister responsible for the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*, currently the Hon Linda Burney MP.

“We have been working closely with all the stakeholders for years now, ever since we signed the Nitmiluk Heads of Agreement in June 2019 with the Northern Territory Government, the Seafood Council, the Amateur Fishermen’s Association and the NT Guided Fishing Industry Association”, the Chairman said.

The Blue Mud Bay Implementation Action Plan was signed by the Northern Land Council and Northern Territory Government in mid-2020. Key elements included arrangements for access to intertidal waters for recreational fishers and amendments to the Fisheries Act.

“Unfortunately, the NT Government has been dragging the chain for the past two years. We have missed key milestones and are worried they won’t keep their word,” said Samuel Bush-Blanasi.

“We know there might need to be an extension to the Action Plan but until we hear from the Government, it is causing confusion for everyone. I know people want certainty.”

Chairman Samuel Bush-Blanasi also asked everyone to respect the spiritual and cultural significance of water for Aboriginal people. “Some areas have sacred sites and Traditional Owners are obliged to protect these sites.”

Information about the areas where long-term access agreements are in place, which will continue past the end of the year, is available on the NLC website.

“Just Google NLC and Blue Mud Bay,” said Chairman Samuel Bush-Blanasi.

“It’s easy.”