



NORTHERN  
LAND COUNCIL

**MEDIA RELEASE**

*Our Land, Our Sea, Our Life*

## **Rangers' joint compliance patrol leads to successful prosecutions**

28 March 2024

**Four people fishing without Northern Land Council (NLC) permits have received fines, after being caught in a joint exercise by Bulgul and Kakadu Rangers.**

The recreational fishers were charged after rangers intercepted four separate boats that were in the Little Finnis River and past the Finnis River closure line. The individuals did not have permits to enter and undertake recreational fishing in the waters.

On 28 November 2023 and 23 January 2024, these matters were heard at the Darwin Local Court, where all four individuals pleaded guilty to entering or remaining on Aboriginal land without a permit. This is an offence under the *Aboriginal Land Act 1978* (NT) and carries financial penalties.

These are the first prosecutions in Aboriginal waters since the introduction of the recreational fishing permit system in January 2023. This outcome provides a strong precedent and gives Traditional Owners (TOs) confidence there will be consequences for people who enter Aboriginal waters without obtaining permission.

Bulgul Rangers undertook the joint patrol that led to the prosecutions alongside rangers from Kakadu National Park in an effort to increase compliance in the Finnis coastal and Peron Islands region. Kakadu's rangers participated in the operation to share the compliance expertise of each group.

Rangers are a regular presence on the water and will continue their marine patrols. The establishment of the new compliance team within NT Fisheries will also provide an increased level of support to Aboriginal ranger groups along the Northern Territory coastline.

Aboriginal people have deep connections to their waters, including the aquatic species that inhabit them. TOs for the Finnis coastal and Peron Islands region limited access to their area in 2021, in the hope that the Northern Territory Government (NTG) would work with them to improve access, use, and resource management of these waters.

TOs and rangers encourage fishers to abide by the current access arrangements.

Permit-free fishing continues to apply to key fishing areas around Darwin and Bynoe Harbours as well as the Daly River, Nhulunbuy, Port Keats and McArthur River regions, based on existing agreements between TOs, the NLC, and the NTG. Outside of these areas, an NLC permit is required to fish recreationally in Aboriginal waters.

Further information about fishing Aboriginal waters and permit requirements can be found at [www.nlc.org.au](http://www.nlc.org.au)

Quotes attributable to Matthew Ryan, Chair of the NLC

- It was great to see the Bulgul Rangers work together with Kakadu National Park rangers, and for the combined effort to have led to four landmark prosecutions.
- These court rulings are a clear reminder that permission, in the form of permits, must be obtained to fish Aboriginal waters.
- This process is simple – check if a permit is required. If it is, apply for one, and then enjoy your fishing!
- The NLC will continue to respond to reports of illegal fishing and those caught will have to face the courts.

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