



Australian Government
Indigenous Land Corporation

Yawuru Native Title Holders Celebrate the Return of Country

Eight years after the recognition of Yawuru native title, Yawuru native title holders are today celebrating the legal ownership of important parts of their country.

In a significant agreement between Yawuru and the Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC) land title to more than 276,000 hectares, comprising Roebuck Plains Station, Roebuck Export Depot special lease and freehold title to the OTC Dampier block is being transferred to Yawuru ownership. The land package is collectively valued at more than \$15 million dollars.

Yawuru leader and Chairman of Nyamba Buru Yawuru Ltd, Mr Patrick Dodson, described the transfer of title to these properties as “a momentous milestone in our journey to rebuild the Yawuru nation. It is the end of a long and at times difficult story to own Roebuck Plains Station but it is the beginning of a new and exciting story of innovative development and management in partnership with the ILC.”

Roebuck Plains Station was purchased on behalf of Yawuru people by the ILC in 1999 and in 2006 questions regarding traditional ownership were resolved when the Federal Court determined that the whole of Roebuck Plains station was exclusive possession Yawuru native title.

Formal negotiations between Yawuru and the ILC have taken place over the past two years and have concluded in an agreement to divest the property to Yawuru.

ILC Chairperson Dr Dawn Casey said the ILC and NBY partnership is an example of how organisations can come together to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes on Indigenous held land.

“Today’s celebration represents the beginning of an expanded, long-term relationship with Yawuru which will encompass a host of opportunities that aim to balance protection of country and cultural and social enhancement with the generation of economic benefits,” Dr Casey said.

The transfer of the properties will involve an ongoing partnership between Yawuru and the ILC with respect to;

- The sub leasing of the cattle operations to the ILC for 15 years
- Income security to Yawuru through commercial rent of land for the cattle production
- A discrete lease arrangement for the export cattle yards facility

- Financial support for Yawuru to manage ecological and cultural significant area of Roebuck Plains through an Indigenous Protected Area (IPA)
- Processes for agreement over Yawuru use of Roebuck plains for Yawuru cultural/ecological management, tourism and horticulture

Mr Dodson says “the divestment agreement and partnership will bring huge benefits to Yawuru and the regional economy through local employment in cattle production, land management and tourism. Our partnership with the ILC and other partners such as scientists means that we can build a globally recognised management regime of an interconnected marine and terrestrial environment that will incorporate one of the most productive cattle stations in northern Australia, a United Nations RAMSAR listed wetlands site, an Indigenous Protected Area and a soon to be gazetted jointly managed Yawuru Conservation Estate.

The divestment of these properties to Yawuru highlights the fundamental importance of native title; producing cultural, social and economic dividends for the Yawuru and broader community.”

NBY Background

Since the Global Agreement was registered on 6 August 2010, Yawuru have built an organisational capacity through their Nyamba Buru Yawuru company structure. Across this structure there are now 76 staff, 49 of whom are Yawuru people, many of whom are employed on a part time and casual basis on language revitalisation, land management and cultural activities. The Yawuru organisational structure reflects the features and underlying philosophy of the Yawuru Global Agreement. Yawuru and non Yawuru people have been recruited for their expertise and potential to undertake various roles and responsibilities including; supporting Yawuru decision making, managing Yawuru Country, providing a range of programs and services to assist and strengthen our community, property development, Yawuru language services, managing third party development applications on Yawuru Country, communications, financial management, investment and commercial development and community and individual capacity building. A fundamental part of Yawuru’s organisational responsibility is to constantly engage the Yawuru community in each aspect of Yawuru’s work. This is done through community forums, local indigenous radio, community consultation, newsletters, social events, and use of cultural advisors and monitors.

Roebuck Plains Station and ILC Background

The Indigenous Land Corporation was established by Commonwealth statute in 1995 as a response by the Australian nation to the recognition of native title rights in Australian law. The ILC purchased Roebuck Plains Station in 1999 for the benefit of Yawuru traditional owners. Situated on rich marine floodplain and supporting a herd of some 20,000 head of cattle, the station is highly profitable and strategically located for the export market. The Station is part of the ILC’s Integrated West Kimberley Cattle Business which incorporates Myroodah Station on Nyikina-Mangala country and the Roebuck Export Depot. The integrated businesses aim to maximise Indigenous training and employment opportunities and last year employed 55 Indigenous workers. The ILC’s successful Training to Employment Programme provides live-in training facilities at Roebuck Plains and Myroodah stations and guarantees an employment position for Indigenous trainees upon completion. In 2013-14 the Roebuck Export Depot saw 60,000 head of cattle through the facility destined for international markets.

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