



## Yamatji Marlpa Barna Baba Maaja

ABORIGINAL CORPORATION

# Pilbara elders give evidence at Federal Court hearing

**Media Release: 15 August 2008**

This week, Aboriginal elders in the Pilbara recounted ancestral knowledge of their laws and customs at a Federal Court hearing in order to strengthen their native title claim.

The hearing, held at Mount Stuart in traditional Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura country, was presided over by Judge McKerracher who heard preservation evidence from elders, Maudie Dowton, Chloe Hayes and Maggie Drage.

The purpose of preservation evidence is to record the cultural and historical knowledge of senior elders who are part of a native title claim. Preservation evidence can include information about the native title group's traditions, laws, customs, language, family history and places of cultural significance.

Maudie Dowton, senior elder from Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura native title group, said that although the hearing was quite stressful she was happy to have her children and grandchildren attend the hearing and learn more about their country.

"It was strange telling people I never met about my life, but taking my grannies\* to the station where I was born and creeks I'd camped felt good inside. I told the Judge about the special place we take women, they touch the sacred rock then no more trouble getting pregnant."

Chloe Hayes, who also gave preservation evidence before the court, recalled her early life on Nanutarra station.

"We were all born at Mount Stuart Station, mum and us kids, but we worked at Nanutarra station and on Sunday's us kids would go hunting goanna. It was hard trying to remember that far back, but I remembered it alright. I live in Onslow now, but being out on this country, my country, makes me feel happy and closer to my family."

Simon Hawkins, Chief Executive Officer of Yamatji Marlpa Barna Baba Maaja Aboriginal Corporation, said that this week's proceedings further highlighted the need to accelerate the native title process.

"It's a tragedy to see elders we represent, who are the cultural custodians of this country, pass away before their native title claims are determined. Claims currently take up to a decade to resolve and can be a complex, drawn out and emotionally exhausting experience for traditional owners," he said.

"With recent talk about changes to the *Native Title Act* and the process surrounding proving connection to country, we welcome changes that would substantially shorten the native title process and lessen the emotional burden for traditional owners.

As the representative body for 24 native title groups in the Pilbara and mid-west we look forward to directly engaging with both state and federal governments on future changes to the native title process."

**ENDS**

\*grandchildren

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## Notes for Editors

Yamatji Marlpa Barna Baba Maaja Aboriginal Corporation is the native title representative body for native title claims in the resource-rich Pilbara, Murchison and Gascoyne representative areas of Western Australia. The organisation has two divisions: the **Pilbara Native Title Service (PNTS)** and the **Yamatji Land and Sea Council (YLSC)**. YMBBMAC has a representative area of almost one million square kilometres and represents 24 native title claims.

YMBBMAC provides a range of services to its members including claim and future-act representation, heritage protection services, community and economic development and natural resource management.

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