



PNTS News

News from Pilbara Native Title Service

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Above: Charlie Coppin, Kurtiri.

Retirement of a Hedland Legend

As an Ngarla elder and the longest serving staff member of Pilbara Native Title Service (PNTS), Charlie Coppin knows more about the region and country than most.

Charlie, also known by his Aboriginal name, Kurtiri, is a widely respected elder and a top law man in the Pilbara. Kurtiri retires from PNTS after 8 years of dedicated service. Known around PNTS as 'the bible', Kurtiri's extensive knowledge of country and culture has been greatly valued by staff and the community.

Born in 1935, Kurtiri spent his childhood at De Grey Station, where he later worked as a stockman. Kurtiri also worked at

other stations around the area, where he was known for his great horsemanship and station hand skills.

Kurtiri started his journey in native title when he worked as an Aboriginal Liaison Officer at Pilbara Aboriginal Land Council - the previous PNTS. He has since worked as the Senior Liaison Officer at PNTS, where lawyers, anthropologists and heritage officers have come to rely on his cultural expertise.

Kurtiri is an elder of the Ngarla community, and was instrumental in his people receiving a determination of native title last year. This came after 10 years of hard work by the Ngarla people.

The PNTS Regional Committee, Board of Directors and staff, both past and present, would like to sincerely thank Kurtiri for his years of dedicated service to the community and pay our respects to a man of great wisdom and dignity.

While we have made every effort to ensure this publication does not contain any culturally sensitive material, there may be references to, and images of, people who have since passed away. If you have any concerns please contact us.



Message from the Pilbara Regional Manager **Nyaparu Jeffries**

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Welcome to the fifth edition of PNTS News.

This edition talks about the retirement of our longest serving staff member, Charlie Coppin - otherwise known as Kurtiri; the Njamal people's native title commercial agreement with Atlas Iron; the recent special general meeting at Cardabia Station in Coral Bay; plus the Uranium and Native Title Conference; changes to the native title system in 2009 and dates of PNTS office closures during the festive season.

Enjoy reading our newsletter and please pass it on to friends and family, or call us to get a copy delivered to you.

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Above: Some members of the Njama community with PNTS and Atlas Iron at the signing of the native title commercial agreement.

Njama agreement sets new **benchmark**

This month a unique deal signed between the Njama native title claim group and Atlas Iron Limited set a new precedent for mining companies throughout Western Australia.

The agreement, for Atlas Iron's Abydos project, combines strong protection of Njama country with a mining compensation package that is well above the current benchmark for native title commercial agreements.

The agreement has set up systems for Njama people and Atlas Iron to

develop joint business initiatives. As an alternative to a signature payment, Atlas Iron has agreed to help capitalise a Njama business that will then enter into a service contract with Atlas Iron.

Njama Traditional Owner, Rodney Monaghan, said that the community was happy the agreement managed to balance the protection of their country with commercial realities.

"Atlas presented us with an agreement that not only supports the protection of our cultural sites, but offered us an opportunity to enter into an enterprise business with the company. As a community it's important that we build a strong future from commercial agreements, and maintain and protect our heritage, laws and customs," said Mr Monaghan.

Simon Hawkins, Chief Executive Officer, Pilbara Native Title Service, said that the agreement was negotiated in three meetings over a six week period.

"The speed at which this agreement was reached was very much due to Atlas's long-term relationship with the Njama people. They came to the negotiating table with respect for the Njama people's rights to culture and country, a willingness to make a good offer and a commitment to following the correct process. When companies have this approach, things can happen very quickly."



Above: YMBBMAC Co-Chair, Roy Bellotti introduces Co-Chair, Mrs Doris Eaton, to the joint meeting.

Traditional Owners meet in **Coral Bay**

On Saturday, 8 November Pilbara Native Title Service, together with Yamatji Land and Sea Council, held its first joint meeting at Cardabia Station in Coral Bay.

Over 50 Traditional Owners travelled from as far as Port Hedland, Tom Price and Karratha to attend the meeting.

The joint meeting was for members to vote on changes to the organisation's constitution. This has come about as a result of the Federal Government's Corporations (*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander*) Act 2006 (CATSI Act).

The proposed changes to the land council's constitution will bring the rules for Indigenous corporations in line with mainstream corporations.

At the meeting members voted on the changes, which include; stronger governance structures, greater transparency and specific clauses that recognise the unique cultures of both regions.

Members also voted on shortening the corporation's name from Yamatji Marlpa Barna Baba Maaja Aboriginal Corporation - to Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation.

These changes will be given to the Federal Government, who have to approve the new constitution. The full outcomes will be announced and implemented in early 2009.

PNTS Chairperson, Mrs Doris Eaton, was proud to see so many Traditional Owners from both the Pilbara and Yamatji regions at the meeting.

"I know a lot of people have travelled a long way to be here today, and its great that everyone came to vote on changes to our land council.

It's important that we have our say on the way our organisation is run and it's been fantastic to meet up with other Traditional Owners from the regions."



Above L-R: PNTS Anthropologist Roina Williams, Anthony Geary, Terry Allen, Atlas Iron's Justin Nye, Damien Perry, Tracin Geary, Johnson Taylor & PNTS Anthropologist Carmen Cummings.

PNTS - helping to protect **Country**

In Western Australia, sites of heritage and cultural significance are protected by the *Aboriginal Heritage Act (1972)*.

Section 17 of the Act states it is “an offence for any person to excavate, destroy, damage, conceal or in any way alter any Aboriginal site without authorisation from the Registrar of Aboriginal Sites or the consent of the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs”.

When a company wants to access country for development or mining they must first undertake a survey to find out if there are any Aboriginal heritage sites in the area. Native title claim groups make the decision on heritage survey teams and who represents a particular area of country.

Yamatji Marlpa Barna Baba Maaja Aboriginal Corporation (YMBBMAC) undertakes one of the largest heritage survey programs in Australia. We work with Aboriginal people to provide professional and culturally appropriate heritage surveys for companies wanting to do business on country.

Our services include organising archaeological and ethnographic surveys, salvage of sites and monitors for earth disturbing works in sensitive areas.

PNTS Anthropologist, Carmen Cummings (*pictured above, far right*), recently lead a team of Njama Traditional Owners on a survey for mining company, Atlas Iron Limited. The heritage survey was for the purpose of identifying and locating Aboriginal sites within the area of proposed works.

“In the Pilbara, PNTS is best positioned to advise mining and development companies on heritage matters in the region.

By working with PNTS and conducting surveys with the recognised Aboriginal people from the area, it not only complies with legislation, but minimises important sites being destroyed.

Working together we can assist companies in their land access, while identifying and protecting Aboriginal heritage and significant sites,” said PNTS Anthropologist, Carmen Cummings.



Above L-R: YMBBMAC Director, Allen 'Boyo' Mitchell, Malgana representative Rodney Bellotti, Badimia representative Frank Walsh & YMBBMAC Director, Toby Smirke.

Talking Uranium and Native Title

This month, Pilbara Traditional Owners went to a uranium and native title conference in Perth held by Yamatji Marlpa Barna Baba Maaja Aboriginal Corporation (YMBBMAC).

The conference was attended by over 100 people from uranium affected native title claim groups, industry, government and environmental groups.

The conference was held because of the State Government's recent decision to lift the ban on uranium mining in WA. The aim of the conference was to talk about uranium mining and how this could affect native title rights, country and significant sites.

Mrs Doris Eaton, Chairperson of Pilbara Native Title Service, was at the conference to learn more about uranium and the possible effects on country.

"It was great to hear from a Traditional Owner who has experienced uranium mining on country. I wanted to know what has been the impact on the land, the trees and birds.

Aboriginal people need more education on uranium issues. We need to make sure that we protect our country for the future and know all the information before we start signing anything."

Simon Hawkins, Chief Executive Officer from YMBBMAC said, "The land council has taken the first step. Now we call upon the State Government and industry to engage with us in what is an important and complex issue."

Presentations were delivered by:

- Mr Phil Narker, Noongar Traditional Owner
- Simon Hawkins, Chief Executive Officer, YMBBMAC
- Peter Watts, Arabanna Traditional Owner from SA
- Michael Angwin, Australian Uranium Association
- Dave Sweeney, Australian Conservation Foundation
- Nick Tsurikov, Calytrix Consulting
- Michael Meegan, Principal Legal Officer, YMBBMAC



Above: Pilbara Native Title claim group Kurama Marthudunera's country.

Support for changes to **Native Title system**

Yamatji Marlpa Barna Baba Maaja Aboriginal Corporation (YMBBMAC) has supported Attorney-General Robert McClelland's announcement that the Federal Court will have a more central role in the management of native title claims.

The new system, which will be introduced to Parliament in 2009, aims to encourage more negotiated settlements. It will see the court determining which native title claims should be referred for mediation, when mediation should occur, and which body, whether the Court or the National Native Title Tribunal, should mediate.

Chief Executive Officer, Simon Hawkins said, "Many claims have now been in the system for up to fifteen years and YMBBMAC supports any initiative that will see native title resolved more efficiently.

We hope the Federal Court's new role in mediating claims will encourage the State and other respondents to move towards consent determinations at a faster rate. YMBBMAC's policy has always been to encourage negotiated settlements over litigation and it is hoped that all parties will continue to support this process."

YMBBMAC will keep Pilbara Native Title Service members informed of any changes that occur in the native title system during 2009.

PNTS Holiday Office Closures

Pilbara Native Title Service offices in Karratha, South Hedland, Tom Price and Perth will be closed for the festive season from Wednesday 24 December, re-opening on Monday 5 January 2009.

The PNTS regional committee, Board of Directors and staff would like to wish all PNTS community members a happy and safe festive season.

"This year has been a very busy one for PNTS and its members, and we look forward to strong progress on native title claim work and the protection of 'country' in 2009,"



Above: Pilbara country.

ABOUT US

PNTS News is produced by the Yamatji Marlpa Barna Baba Maaja Aboriginal Corporation.

We are the native title representative body for native title claims in the Pilbara, Murchison and Gascoyne regions of Western Australia.

We work with Pilbara Aboriginal people to pursue:

- Recognition and acceptance of culture in country
- A strong future for people and country

SERVICES

Our work includes:

- Providing legal representation and research to assist with native title claims
- Negotiating land use agreements
- Heritage protection services
- Community, economic and environmental projects

MEMBERSHIP

PNTS membership is open to all adult Pilbara Aboriginal people. Our membership also includes people who live in other areas but who have a traditional connection to Pilbara land.

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Please note that the information contained in this newsletter does not constitute legal advice.