

Your way forward for Native Title

# MESSAGE STICK



Sept 2024



*Message Stick is published by the North Queensland Land Council Native Title Representative Body Aboriginal Corporation.  
The cover image was captured by Reilly Wilson-Neil at Granite Gorge, Arriga QLD.*

NQLC acknowledges the Traditional Owners of our representative region.

We recognise their continuous relationships to the lands and waters, and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

NQLC takes a moment to reflect on our recently departed loved ones and recognise their contributions to preserving culture, promoting their history and supporting NQLC's efforts to secure their native title rights and interests.

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## Strengthening Our Foundations

To begin, I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of country throughout NQLC's representative footprint and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters, and culture. I pay my respects to Elders past, present, and emerging.

### Corporate Document Reviews

As part of our ongoing commitment to maintaining best practices, we are conducting a review of our corporate documents, including the Enterprise Agreement and Rulebook. This review aims to ensure that our documents are updated to reflect our strategic direction and regulatory requirements. We will incorporate feedback from our stakeholders to ensure these documents meet organisational needs and comply with relevant laws and standards. A comprehensive plan will be developed to implement key changes and communicate to our teams and stakeholders.

### Empowering Future Generations

We aim to incorporate cultural activities and learning opportunities on country for young men and women. These initiatives will provide a platform for both to actively participate in and benefit from NQLC's work. We encourage our Members to consider ways to involve the younger generation, fostering a deeper connection to native title and our shared heritage.



*Images courtesy of AIATSIS Facebook page. These photos are not our own.*

### AIATSIS Summit June 2024

In early June, the Board and staff had the privilege of attending the AIATSIS Summit in Narm. A pivotal event that brought together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, leaders, youth, and a diverse range of stakeholders. As one of the largest conferences dedicated to First Nations peoples, the summit offered valuable opportunities to support and strengthen our cultures, knowledge, and governance. The program included a three-day native title component and various discussions throughout the week on Indigenous research. I was particularly inspired by the keynote addresses from Jamie Lowe, CEO of the National Native Title Council, who delivered the Mabo Lecture, and Justin Mohamed, Ambassador for First Nations People. Their contributions highlighted the summit's significance in advancing our collective goals.



*Images courtesy of AIATSIS Facebook page. These photos are not our own.*

Angie Ahee  
NQLC's Chairperson



# OPERATIONAL UPDATE



The Enterprise Agreement is a key instrument covering employee work terms and benefits. The process to negotiate a new EA has been a collaborative effort, between Bargaining Representatives from the Community and Public Sector Union and Non-Union Representatives, the Executive Management Team and an external Advisor from Coopers Grace Ward. The review actions of the EA19 was overdue. The goal of the new EA24 is to balance employer terms with the needs of our employees. A higher aspiration is to make the NQLC an Employer of Choice. CEO has encouraged all Bargaining Representatives to work together and create a new EA stakeholders will be proud of.

## AusIMM Conference

In late August, CEO and FAME Coordinator/EDST Manager, Jules Taylor attended the Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy Conference in Brisbane. This conference was a gathering for geologists and engineers to discuss the future of Critical Minerals in Australia. Our participation was instrumental in gaining valuable insights into this rapidly evolving sector. By engaging with industry leaders and experts, we aim to ensure that NQLC remains active in supporting our members, by identifying opportunities and helping to bridge any gaps within the sector. All new knowledge will help to shape our future plans and maintain strong advocacy for our members.



## Celebrating CLCAC 40 Years!

Director Akee and CEO were fortunate to attend the 40th Anniversary of the Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (CLCAC). Formed in 1982 and incorporated two years later, CLCAC acknowledged its early history as part of NQLC. At the ceremony CEO presented a commemorative plaque to Murrandoo Yanner who accepted the gesture on behalf of CLCAC. Today CLCAC represents nine southern Gulf Aboriginal language groups and operates as a Native Title Service Provider. Their significant contribution includes their role in the landmark High Court case Yanner v Eaton (1999), which set a precedent for protecting hunting rights for Indigenous people. NQLC is proud of our association with CLCAC and look to future working opportunities.

Stakeholders from across Australia gathered in Burketown to celebrate CLCAC's achievements and honour its founders. Dir Akee and I had an amazing night, celebrating this major accomplishment with CLCAC and witnessing the enduring strength and spirit of the community.



*Leon Yeatman*

**Chief Executive Officer**



## Progress in Native Title Claims

### Gugu Badhun

Negotiations are currently underway with the State regarding the Gugu Badhun Claim. Discussions are focused on reaching a consensus on the declaration of native title. The legal team is confident in achieving recognition for the Gugu Badhun people's native title rights, with progress reflecting a promising path toward formal acknowledgment.

### Gudjala

Recently, expert anthropologist Kevin Mayo, along with our legal team, visited Country to gather lay evidence from Gudjala community members. This on-the-ground effort aims to strengthen the claim by incorporating firsthand accounts and insights from the community, enhancing the overall depth and accuracy of the evidence presented.

### Muluridji People #3

For the Muluridji People #3 Claim, the State has accepted the connection and consented to proceed. Negotiations are ongoing on specific terms related to native title rights and interests. While most tenure agreements are settled, some partial matters remain. This marks significant progress towards recognizing the Muluridji People's native title rights.

### Gurambilbarra Wulgurukaba

A separate question hearing regarding two ancestors is scheduled to start on 31st March 2025 in Townsville, lasting two weeks. This will be held jointly with the Bindal people due to shared facts in their claims. The hearing aims to address key issues that could impact the recognition of native title rights linked to these ancestors.

### Gurambilbarra Wulgurukaba Mada

The State has accepted the connection for the Gurambilbarra Wulgurukaba Mada Claim and agreed to proceed by consent to determine the claim. A draft agreement is expected to be authorized either late this year or early next year, marking a critical step towards formally recognizing the Gurambilbarra Wulgurukaba people's native title rights.

### Gia Peoples and Ngaro Peoples

The Gia and Ngaro Peoples Claim has been registered with the National Native Title Tribunal (NNTT), allowing the claim to move forward. Efforts are underway to collect connection evidence and progress towards a determination, with initial steps taken to negotiate a possible consent determination. This is an important phase in recognizing the native title rights of the Gia and Ngaro Peoples.



*Jasmin Phillips*  
Principal Legal Officer

# HISTORIC WIN FOR JIRRBAL PEOPLE



In an eagerly awaited victory for the Jirrbal People, on 6 September, the Honourable Justice Rangiah of the Federal Court of Australia handed down a determination of native title by consent in relation to part of the Jirrbal People #4 (QUD983/2015) native title claim (the Part A Determination).

The Jirrbal #4 claim, submitted in 2015, encompassed a vast 279,904 hectares of land and waters in the Tablelands Region of Far North Queensland, brimming with cultural significance and natural beauty. The Part A Determination recognises the Jirrbal People as the rightful native title holders of the determination area in Australian law.

The Part A Determination secures exclusive native title over 9,797.53 hectares, and non-exclusive native title over 72,517.2 hectares of lands and waters of the traditional estate of the Jirrbal People.

The Wabubadda Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC (ICN 7117), which is the prescribed body corporate (PBC) for the previous three Jirrbal determinations, was nominated and determined as the PBC for the Part A Determination area and will manage the determined native title rights and interests on behalf of the Jirrbal People.

Though parts of the Jirrbal #4 claim area remain on foot in the Federal Court, and there is still work to be done, this determination is nevertheless a significant achievement for the Jirrbal People and in particular for their Elders past and present. The NQLC is planning to organize a celebratory event later this year to mark this achievement and the invaluable contributions of the Jirrbal Elders. Details will be unveiled as plans unfold.



*Image courtesy of Trevor Oakley. This photos is not our own. Taken at Millstream Falls.*



*Image courtesy of Tropical North Queensland. This photos is not our own. Taken at Halls Falls.*



*Image courtesy of Paul Kurtis. This photos is not our own. Taken at McKenzie Falls.*

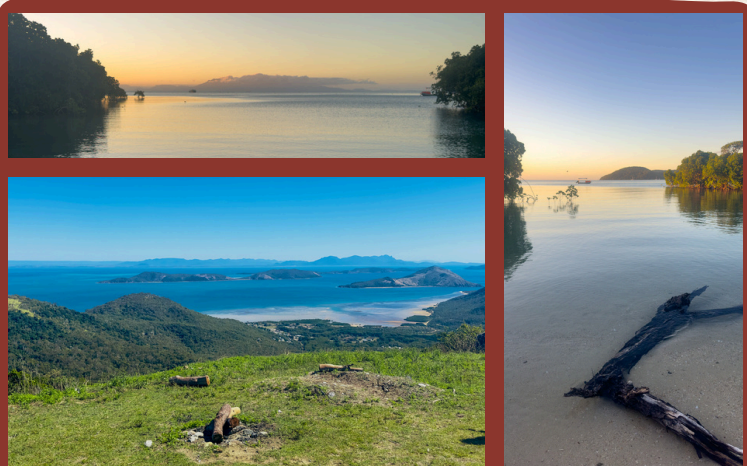
# MANBARRA LAY EVIDENCE ON COUNTRY



In late August and early September, a team from NQLC's Cairns and Townsville office, commenced a two-week journey around Manbarra Country for a deeply engaging lay evidence project. The purpose of the trip was to collect personal accounts from Manbarra Traditional Owners, adding crucial firsthand perspectives to bolster the Manbarra People's native title claim.

On the islands around Palm Island and out to the reef, our team had the privilege of engaging directly with Traditional Owners on Country. These conversations resonated with stories of heritage and the enduring connection to the country. Manbarra Elders and Traditional Owners graciously shared personal insights, memories and stories recounting what they have seen, heard and lived on their ancestral lands.

The Manbarra claim is notable as the first land and sea claim to be filed in the Federal Court by NQLC, covering an extensive area of immense cultural and spiritual significance. Our team's journey led them to sites of profound cultural importance, deeply respected by the Manbarra Traditional Owners. It was a rare and cherished opportunity to explore these places that embody their rich heritage. Each location revealed a unique story, from Dreaming tracks to sacred sites that have long served as sanctuaries for the community's totem animals.



A standout moment of the trip was the opportunity to listen to creation stories and Dreamtime narratives from the Elders and Traditional Owners themselves. These stories, rich with history and cultural significance play as vital threads in the fabric of the Manbarra Peoples enduring connection to their land. As the Elders spoke, their passion and pride were evident, with each story offering a powerful reminder of their deep-rooted heritage and the ongoing journey to preserve and pass on this vital knowledge to future generations. Witnessing their passionate storytelling was a moving testament to the strength and continuity of Manbarra culture.

The stories and testimonies gathered will be instrumental in advancing their native title claim, highlighting the enduring connection that defines their identity. We extend our sincere gratitude to the Manbarra People for their generosity in sharing their history, guiding us through their country, and retelling the journey of their ancestors. We acknowledge the Manbarra People for their unwavering commitment and invaluable contributions, which are vital in the pursuit of justice and rightful recognition of their people and country.

*All interviews and stories were recorded with the explicit consent of participants, ensuring that the process respected and preserved the integrity and autonomy of the Manbarra People.*



# EDST UPDATE



This year is flying by, and the Engagement and Development Support Team has been busy. The FAME Unit and PBC Support Unit collaborate closely to achieve real outcomes for NQLC clients through their PBCs.

One key project involves working with three PBCs to combine resources and establish a partnership corporation to compete for large contracts through Supply Nation. EDST is managing the project, engaging Terri Janke and Co. to establish the corporation and KPMG to find suitable joint venture partners. This effort creates real opportunities for economic development and self-determination from native title. If your PBC has economic development opportunities, EDST can assist or help with grant applications. Contact us through the PBC Support Unit email for support. Read more in the FAME and PBC Support Unit updates, and we look forward to sharing more success stories in the next edition of the Message Stick.

## Native Title Act Future Acts Regime Review

The Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) has commenced a review of the future acts regime of the Native Title Act. NQLC FAME Unit has met with the ALRC initially to express NQLC's concerns about the functionality of the regime and to ensure NQLC's views are taken into consideration before the publication of the consultation paper. Formal submissions will then be called for in 2025. Further information about the review can be found at:

[Review of the Future Acts Regime | ALRC](#)

If you would like to participate or would like further information please do not hesitate to contact FAME Unit or the ALRC directly.



Scan QR Code for more information about the review



## New Staff

FAME Unit welcomed Paralegal Bujimulla Yanner to the Cairns office, helping ease the team's workload. Learn more about Buj on page 11. We also welcomed a new intern on 18 September for her Practical Legal Training. An Indigenous woman from Far North Queensland, she is on her path to becoming a solicitor in Queensland.

## Large Negotiations and ILUAs

Negotiations for large projects, like renewable energy and mining, often begin with a section 29 'right to negotiate' (RTN) or an ILUA request from proponents. Many such negotiations are underway in the NQLC region. For major projects, a CHMA or CHMP is usually negotiated early, allowing native title groups to influence design and approvals. Early engagement has led to wind turbines being relocated, saving time and money. If you need assistance with proponents, contact the NQLC FAME Unit.

*Julia (Jules) Taylor*

**Manager Engagement and Development Support Team & Acting  
Coordinator Future Acts Mining and Exploration (FAME) Unit**



# PBCSU TEAM UPDATE



The PBC Support Unit offers corporate support to the 32 Registered Native Title Body Corporates (RNTBCs) within the NQLC RNTB area. PBCSU is also assisting 3 native title claim groups to develop policies and establish their corporations to be the RNTBC upon a successful determination of their claim.

## Rulebooks, Policies Reviews and Updates

PBCSU continues to assist PBCs in conducting comprehensive reviews of their rulebooks and policies. Currently, we are working with 4 groups to tailor policies and procedures to their needs as their corporations and operations have expanded. Two PBCs have replaced their rulebooks this year and another PBC has approached the PBCSU with a request to replace their rulebook to be compliant with the 2021 NTA Amendments Act. If you want to review your rulebook, or have not updated your rulebook since the 2021 NTA Amendments Act and want some assistance, please do not hesitate to contact the PBC Support Unit.

## General Meeting Assistance

PBCSU has been requested to assist with 5 general meetings this financial year. The assistance requested is usually in the form of facilitating elections, providing an independent chairperson, providing legal advice, taking minutes and/or providing technical support. If you require support for your AGM, please contact us through the PBC Support Unit.

## Planning

The PBCSU assists PBCs to develop business plans, strategic plans, and community plans with suitably qualified independent professionals. These plans are critical for PBCs when applying for grants, developing a negotiation strategy or growing your business. If you would like to discuss developing business, community or strategic plans for your PBC please contact the PBC Support Unit.

## Ongoing Support

Many PBCs and directors come to PBC Support Unit for assistance on a variety of ad-hoc issues. PBCSU has almost every PBC in our region with issues related to:

1. managing internal relationships;
2. finding technical experts;
3. rulebook and CATSI Act enquiries;
4. employment Issues;
5. responding to member and/or common law holder complaints and queries;
6. procuring and setting up office and AV conferencing equipment;
7. responding to correspondence from the wider public or proponents; and
8. any general day to day PBC related issue that directors want to discuss.



*David Jesudason*

**Coordinator PBC Support Unit (PBCSU)**



# STAFF UPDATE



We are pleased to announce Jasmin Phillips' promotion to Principal Legal Officer at the North Queensland Land Council (NQLC). Jasmin commenced with the NQLC in October 2015 as a Senior Legal Administration Officer/Paralegal. In October 2016, she won a position as Legal Officer and was awarded a Senior Legal Officer position in January 2022. Jasmin is excited to take on this new role and looks forward to contributing to the ongoing success of the North Queensland Land Council and the communities we serve.



We are also excited to announce the addition of six new team members who have recently joined the NQLC family. Each brings unique skills and experiences that will strengthen our commitment to supporting our members. Let's give a warm welcome to:

## David Castor - Deputy Principal Legal Officer



David has 15 years of experience as a criminal lawyer, working closely with Aboriginal defendants, victims, and communities across the Gulf of Carpentaria, Greater Townsville, and the Top End. He and his wife returned to Cairns for their 14-month-old son to be near family, and for David to use his experience with diverse cultures to help empower Aboriginal groups in reclaiming their country and shaping their future.

## Lucy Toepfer - Legal Officer



Lucy earned her BA/LLB from the University of Auckland and spent five years in Criminal Defence in New Zealand. After moving to Australia, she was admitted to the Supreme Court of Queensland and now represents Aboriginal People in securing traditional ownership of lands and waters in Far North Queensland.

## Bujimulla Yanner - Paralegal FAME Team



A proud Ganggalidda and Bindal man and father to his 1-year-old son. Bujimulla joins us as a Paralegal in the FAME unit, with the exciting news of soon becoming a lawyer as he awaits his admission. With a background in an in-house role at an engineering firm, Bujimulla is eager to dive into all things native title, bringing his passion and fresh perspective to the team.

## Jenni Dijkstra - Accounts



Born and raised in Cairns, Jenni has spent her entire career locally. She worked for 14 years at Totally Workwear, where she gained experience as a Bookkeeper, Office Manager, and in Accounts. We're excited to have Jenni's extensive background and local knowledge on board!

## Sandra Roberts - Finance Officer



Sandra, who has been a Cairns local for 19 years, brings extensive finance experience across sectors such as Agriculture, Legal, Mental Health, Indigenous Health Care, and multiple First Nation Organisations. After a 3-month sabbatical, she's back in the working force and ready to contribute her expertise to our team. We're thrilled to have Sandra with us!

## Reilly Wilson-Neil - Media Officer



Reilly is recognised as one of Australasia's Top Emerging Photographers for 2022 and 2023, with commendations in the Mono Photographic Awards. He began his career in real estate photography and has since built a dynamic skillset in visual media, including social media, videography, and aerial imagery. We're excited to see Reilly's creative talents shine at NQLC!



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