

Chapter 12

No more yardin' us up like cattle

Jack Green and Jimmy Morrison facilitated by Seán Kerins

In the south-west Gulf of Carpentaria in the Northern Territory there are five language groups, Mara, Gudanji, Yanyuwa, Garawa and Waanyi. We are all related through ceremony, culture, land and marriage. We lost control of our country, all of it, in the same way, when white people brought cattle into our country. Our people tried to protect their country, especially the wetlands; many of them were important sacred sites and places where there was always lots of food. When people speared the cattle to protect the sites and the water from being fouled, whole families were shot, men, women and children.¹ Others were flogged and chained up and walked from places, like Wundigalla on Robinson River to Borroloola. Some of them died on the road.

We claimed some of our country back in the early days of Land Rights beginning in the late 1970s. We didn't win all our country back; we only managed to get a few of the pastoral stations where white people had failed to make a living and walked off or were looking for a quick sale. In 1984 we won the Nicholson (Waanyi/Garawa Aboriginal Land Trust) through a land claim. We got Robinson River (Garawa Aboriginal Land Trust) in 1990 when we managed to get a grant to buy the pastoral lease. Once we had the lease we ran a claim over it to change the title to Aboriginal freehold. The Commonwealth's Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 allows for such claims, but only for Aboriginal owned stations. That's why we could do it. We did it so we wouldn't ever lose it again, as under the Land Rights Act the land becomes inalienable, like it is under our law. These are the two places where the Garawa and Waanyi peoples have started caring for country projects.

The families who moved back on to the Nicholson in the 1970s from the mission in Doomadgee, in Queensland, and other places where they had been pushed, tried to make a living, but it was tough. They were trying to make a living

1 T Roberts (2005) *Frontier Justice: A History of the Gulf Country to 1900*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane.

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