

Traditional Owner Comment

Maluwap Nona, Chair, Maluilgal TSI Corporation

Interview conducted by Chris Ryan on Thursday 4 June at the 10th Annual Native Title Conference 2009 in Melbourne.

What does native title mean to you?

Native title has given us a sense of belonging. It is 17 years post-Mabo and we are now starting to grip our cultural connection to the sea and land, the natural resources and species, both on the land and sea that are part of our totem, our customs, and our beliefs and values.

Native title has also given us a wider connection with other traditional property owners in the region of the Torres Strait and a broader sense of belonging.

What is the biggest challenge facing your PBC?

The hardest part is breaking the barriers of mindsets that have been around since 1872. There's now a common understanding that we're all traditional property owners – but our job as PBCs is to bridge the gaps and strategically look at what are we trying to protect and preserve for the next generations to come.

Yes, we are under-resourced, but one of our greatest strengths is voluntary advocacy. If we are going to maintain this way forward there are many that need to be groomed in to carry on this responsibility. It doesn't matter how long it's going to take, it's got to be done.

What is the future for native title in your country?

There's a way forward now. We've got the authorities to the table – the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) and regional councils - to form a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with all the PBCs. This will be a learning curve for all of us, to share the responsibilities and to see that we are all important in the region and we all can play a part in the outcomes we want to achieve.

The spirit of our ancestors, it speaks through us and I am at a time where I am so privileged that I've been given the mandate to serve and be a servant for my people. To me, serving them in such a way, I am more blessed than rich. The richness, that is within.

I just want to see that the campfire is still burning and the fish are still roasted on the beach and we can have a good laugh and see the sunset and the sunrise and still express our good ways of island custom. We are always welcoming people to our country and want to share that knowledge with all the people in this global village.

NTRU Project Report

NTRU Submissions

The NTRU has made recent submissions on heritage law reform and climate change adaptation.

The Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts is presently reviewing the Indigenous heritage law regime. The NTRU prepared a submission on the proposed amendments to the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984 (ATSIHP Act)*, commenting specifically on how the reforms will affect native title. The *ATSIHP Act* was developed as a short term measure to protect sites and objects of significance to Indigenous people that were under threat. The Evatt Review conducted in 1996 exposed the shortcomings of the regime, however one subsequent reform attempt proved ineffective. It is hoped that the present review and reform will contribute to a more effective and empowering heritage protection regime.

The National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility requested comments from various stakeholders regarding a draft settlements and infrastructure adaptation plan. The NTRU offered brief comments on this draft, which will contribute to the final adaptation plan. Climate change has the potential to affect native title rights and interests through damage to land, sites of significance and water resources. The research plan is based on the themes of the built environment; vulnerable coastal communities; infrastructure; and urban and regional planning and management.