

THIS IS ARABANA COUNTRY:

AN INTERVIEW WITH DAVID HULL, DIRECTOR OF ARABANA ABORIGINAL CORP RNTBC



David Hull, Director of Arabana Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC.

Credit: Gabrielle Lauder

“ARABANA PEOPLE TRAVELLED FROM NEAR AND FAR”

My country, my people

In May 2012, the Federal Court granted the Arabana People native title to almost 70,000 square kilometres in South Australia's north, including Lake Eyre. The majority of the area is covered by pastoral lease, including Anna Creek Station, the largest working cattle station in the world. It also includes three reserves, Elliot Price Conservation Park, Lake Eyre National Park and Wabma Kadarbu Mound Springs Conservation Park as well as the towns of Marree and William Creek.

Our native title experience

Our claim has been going for a long while; I really can't remember when it first started. The claim was lodged in 1998 but there was a lot of work preceding that. At the time a few of our elders were involved in providing evidence of connection to country. It has been a long process and a frustrating one at times, with all the bureaucracy and red tape we have had to go through. We also had lengthy consultations with other native title holders.

The state assisted in pushing our claim along, in pointing us in the right direction, and letting us know what we needed to do to achieve the final outcome. They were more of a help to us than a hindrance.

There have been a number of challenges along the way, including sorting out our claim boundaries with other groups. Although the government was helpful, at times we had to strategise to overcome certain obstacles in our negotiations with the state. We also encountered some upsets with recreational visitors to Lake Eyre. Through our Chair Aaron Stuart we have indicated to those people, the State, and DEWNR [Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources] that boating on Lake Eyre—when it is full—is disrespectful to Arabana People as it disrupts our Dreaming stories. We have had researchers ask to go on country to look at bird populations and we have negotiated permission for such research purposes. But we won't compromise our integrity or the sacredness of our sites where there is disrespect.



Arabana Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC committee with Justice Finn at the native title determination hearing in May 2012.

Credit: Colleen Strangways

The Arabana determination

Countrymen, Arabana People, travelled from near and far. People came from as far as Darwin and Sydney to celebrate with us. Many people who grew up and lived at Finnis Springs, where the determination was heard, went up early and camped at the creek. SANTS assisted 80 cars in getting there. Station owners and mining companies were also present. Some news teams came in, one with their helicopter.

The elders did a formal welcome in Arabana. We went through the formal sitting and the Federal Court finally endorsed the determination of native title. We were then given the legal documentation and we did the formal signing of the ILUAs. This was followed by entertainment: music and dancing. People had the opportunity to visit the burial sites of their elders. Many people stayed on until the next day.

The determination, declared under a tent on the Finnis Springs station, brings to an end a 14-year claim by our traditional owners. Under the terms of the consent order the Arabana people will have access to the land for hunting, camping, fishing and traditional ceremonies.

Into the future

I am hopeful that good things will come from native title into the future. It's already getting people back on country. We have already talked about having a celebration every year at Finnis Springs. We plan to make that an annual event for people so a lot more people can come home, as many people missed out this year.

Our Chair has alluded to changing the name of the lake to its traditional name: Kati Thanda. We are still in the discussion stage but the feelers are out there. This is something that the whole Arabana group would have to endorse before it went through the legal hoops.

Through our native title negotiations with the state we have been able to secure some compensation through ILUAs. This includes some blocks of lands, some money to run the PBC, and the funding of work projects at Finnis. We will also receive funding to build ablution blocks

and provide for running water at Finnis, to build camping areas to allow people to come back on country, and to restore the old mission houses. With this money we also hope to provide employment for some of our younger folk living in Marree. We also have money for some environmental work and later on we hope to develop a tourism project. So there will be a little bit of money for the community there.

The significance of this determination is that it gives our people certainty: Arabana people can go back on country now without fear of station owners and other parties. We have rights to fish and hunt and camp on any part of our lands. We also have the right to negotiate with companies regarding any mining activities on our country. It gives us the acknowledgement of what we have always known: this is Arabana country.

**“OUR LAND IS OUR IDENTITY;
IT'S WHO WE ARE”**

**Aaron Stuart,
Chair of Arabana Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC**



Justice Finn, Arabana elder Reg Dodd, and children at Finnis Springs. Credit: Colleen Strangways