



# An interview with

MERVYN MULARDY &  
WYNSTON SHOVELLER

FROM KARAJARRI TRADITIONAL  
LANDS ASSOCIATION

INTERVIEWED BY BHIAMIE WILLIAMSON **AIATSIS**

## MERVYN

My name is Mervyn Mulardy. I'm from the Bidadanga region next to Broome in the north-west of Western Australia and I'm the Karajarri cultural programs coordinator.

## WYNSTON

And I'm Wynston Shoveller from Bidadanga as well. We are Karajarri Traditional Owners.

Mervyn: Back at home we do a lot of hunting and fishing as well as ceremonies. We take our kids out and teach them culture, teach them different parts of their culture. We are very strong in cultural land management, looking after Country. As a cultural database manager I record old people, I record the old songs, the language, trying to preserve a lot of culture for our people. We love our hunting, we love our fishing. My son is a great hunter, he is always out there with the boat, he get some turtle for me, some fish for me, some dugong and sometimes he come back with story to tell me. You know, when he don't catch anything, he comes back and tells me, 'Oh Dad, the

harpoon came out', but I don't want the story, I want the food!

Wynston: And as young fellas we go out fishing and hunting a lot, but my job is mainly just as a Ranger. Travelling and getting access the Country, you know, in the really remote areas of Country. We work on the land but we also manage the sea, the coastal site. And we live where we can maintain a sustainable use of being on the land.

Mervyn: We was the first native title claim for the Kimberly Land Council (KLC). We was also one of the first PBCs set-up in Australia of which I was the Chairman for about eight years. But it's been a struggle to find out how to structure our



# Karajarri

PBC, our businesses, to fit with the government. Because of the lack of funding through government, and they don't tell you this is how you set-up your PBC, we didn't know what rules applied to Karajarri when we started. So we threw it back in their faces and said, 'we don't wanna set up the PBC how **you** want it, we wanna set up our PBC the way **we** wanna set it up'. In the early days of the government, we could say we wanna set it up our way. They tried to throw it back at us and say we aren't going to fund you, but the government only funds us a little bit anyways. Not even someone's wage you know? And yet they send mining companies to our Country and want to do all these agreement and this and that.

But we managed to get some good governance structures in our PBC. We got a council of Elders and we got the Chairman and Directors. Culture always comes through in our decision making. We got cultural protocols that we have to abide by and we try to structure what we do within our cultural boundaries. Even when we set up ILUAs (Indigenous Land Use Agreements), we say to the government, 'you got to listen to our culture, you can't develop without thinking about our culture'. You know, if you are developing our community then you got to develop our culture as well. We say you can't build on here

until we get our old people to check it, to see if there are any important sites or other various sites where you build it. And then we send out our people to look over a place, to check out the place where they wanna build something. So they got to abide by our rules. We bring all that cultural development into other decision making, especially with ILUAs.

Wynston: And while it's very important for our old people to be involved, it's also very important for them old people to understand what we, as Rangers, do as well. That's one of my main roles as a Karajarri Ranger, to work closely with the old people and make sure they know what we do and what we face.

Mervyn: We try to train the young fellas. You know in the future they gonna take over, and so we teach them in that cultural aspect of our law and the Country. Karajarri young people are well educated in Karajarri way as well as white fella way. The young people come to get guidance from the Elders for their culture and we do training sessions with them. And the younger people are incorporating what they learnt from the old people, so they can best manage the programs. So we try to make sure they are getting that knowledge and understanding. We try our best to mix that traditional knowledge with European knowledge.

You know, the young fellas are the ones that will take all this forward, so we try and give them as much guidance as we can but still supporting them to come up with their own ideas.

Wynston: You know, our old people fought so hard and for so long to get native title. It's real important for us, that native title, cause it gives Karajarri people more control of our Country. It gives us more power to make decision over the Country. But at its heart, it doesn't make big difference for us as Karajarri people, cause in our hearts we know we own that place.

Mervyn: We feel that native title is just another part of the journey, maybe use native title to push for a treaty. We would be happier if we were using native title to push for else, something beyond native title, that's why it's so important to keep our young people close, cause they gonna be the ones that come up with this stuff, they got the ideas. We hoping to get more from all of this, to do the best for our old people and also do the best for Karajarri people as a whole now and into the future.

Opposite page: Wynston and Mervyn at AIATSIS looking at the collection. Credit: Nell Reidy, AIATSIS.

Behind: Karajarri Country. Credit: Tran Tran, AIATSIS.



# Country