



# Senate committee recognises the value of land deals

## Native Title and You



**By National Native Title Tribunal President GRAEME NEATE**

Indigenous groups across Australia have become involved in managing national parks and State forests under native title agreements reached with governments and other parties.

The management arrangements have been shown to work for all participants. Indigenous people benefit from the opportunity to take responsibility for their traditional land, and from training and employment opportunities. Governments and the general community benefit from the Indigenous groups' cultural knowledge.

The value of such arrangements has been recognised by a Senate committee that recently conducted an inquiry into national parks and protected areas.

The Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Standing Committee released a report, 'Conserving Australia' on 12 April, recommending that Indigenous people should have a greater role in managing national parks.

The committee found that Indigenous Australians 'have a unique relationship with Australia's land and sea', including

the conservation estate. In areas which may be subject to native title claims or rights, Indigenous people have 'a legal as well as historical role to play in the ongoing management of such land'.

"Indigenous land management practices have helped shape the modern landscape and biodiversity, and their knowledge or continuing use of such practices will be important to the ongoing protections of conservation values," the committee stated.

I welcome the committee's findings, particularly the third recommendation: "That all governments give greater priority to Indigenous knowledge and participation in park management generally, and fire management in particular."

Under the *Native Title Act 1993*, groups around the country have negotiated Indigenous land use agreements (ILUAs) and reached native title consent determinations that incorporate various management arrangements between Indigenous groups and governments in national parks and state forests.

In February this year the Bundjalung People of Byron Bay, in northern New South Wales, and the NSW Government signed two ILUAs that incorporate arrangements to co-manage national park areas. The agreements build on an earlier ILUA the two groups reached in 2001 that created the Arakwal National Park and provided opportunities for the

native title group to train to become rangers. A number of young people have since gone through the training process and have been employed as rangers.

The Githabul people of north-eastern NSW also finalised an ILUA with the NSW Government in February 2007 that incorporates a commitment for the parties to work together to manage and protect 10 national parks and 13 State forests within the agreement area.

Agreements to co-manage national park areas have also been reached in north Queensland, the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Victoria.

Such agreements not only establish a framework for the protection of the natural environment and the harnessing of cultural knowledge, but give groups the opportunity to learn from one another and build constructive working relationships.

For a copy of the Senate committee's report go to [http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/ecita\\_ctte/national\\_parks/index.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/ecita_ctte/national_parks/index.htm)



**NSW Native Title Services chief and Labor Party National President Warren Mundine, Earl and June Monsell and Roy Williams joined in the Githabul signing celebrations at Woodenbong.**

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