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# See it through

It is fitting that a key milestone in Australia's history of native title is a significant date in National Reconciliation Week, to be celebrated from 27 May.

National Reconciliation Week concludes on 3 June, the anniversary of the High Court of Australia's historic 1992 judgment in the Mabo native title case.

That judgment recognised, for the first time since colonisation, Indigenous peoples' rights in relation to their traditional lands under their traditional laws and customs.

It provided the impetus for the Native Title Act which, since 1994, has given Indigenous people in many parts of Australia the opportunity to have their native title rights and interests recognised.

Around the same time, the importance of understanding, respect, trust and harmony between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people was being recognised in government policies promoting reconciliation.

The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation was established in 1991 to promote these values and it operated until 2000, the same year as the reconciliation bridge walks.

Reconciliation Australia, a national organisation, was then established. Its aim is to build and promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians for the wellbeing of the nation.

Ten years on, Reconciliation Australia has set this year's National Reconciliation Week theme as

'Reconciliation: Let's see it through!', asking people to embrace the future and aspire to achieve great things together.

This goal sits well with the National Native Title Tribunal's vision of

timely, effective native title and related outcomes-which can be considered as reconciliation on the ground.

Native title processes continue to make a significant contribution to reconciliation.

They help develop relationships between diverse groups of people who come together because they have interests in particular land or waters.

Native title outcomes over the past decade show how this relationship



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

between native title and reconciliation has progressed and how a commitment to 'see it through' has been realised.

Ten years ago, at 30 April 2000, after the Native Title Act had been operating for six years, there were 10 registered determinations of native title, eight that native title existed.

**'Native title outcomes over the past decade show how this relationship between native title and reconciliation has progressed'**

Since then (at 30 April 2010), 119 more determinations of native title have been registered, including 84 that native title exists. Another three determinations are awaiting registration. Many determinations are the result of negotiations between the parties.

There are also many Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUAs) about the use of land and waters where native title might exist.

The number of registered ILUAs

continues to grow as parties realise how useful these agreements can be in clarifying how the interests of each group can co-exist.

The scheme for ILUAs was introduced in 1998. By April 2000, just six ILUAs were registered with the Tribunal. The number of registered ILUAs now totals 420 (at 30 April 2010) and they cover more than 14 per cent of Australia's land and waters.

Other government activity has been undertaken and policies introduced which connect native title and reconciliation.

Since September 2005, Commonwealth Attorneys-General have convened annual meetings of native title ministers from State, Territory and Federal governments, to work together to achieve better outcomes for all native title stakeholders.

The ministers have developed guidelines for negotiating broader and regional land settlements, and have discussed how the Commonwealth might finance states and territories to settle native title claims. The group has also taken steps to ensure a coordinated approach to identifying existing Commonwealth programs and resources that may support native title settlements.

The spirit of agreement-making is evident in other negotiations around the country. Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are coming together, often for the first time, to work out how their needs can be addressed through the native title process, often in relation to proposed exploration and mining projects.

Tribunal resources and mediation services support many negotiations.

Through native title we see understanding and trust develop where it may not

have existed before.

National Reconciliation Week is a good opportunity to reflect on how far the community has come during the past ten years and to acknowledge the positive role of the native title process in reconciliation.

We can draw on positive experiences to meet the many challenges ahead, including reaching more agreements and ensuring that the parties to each agreement 'see it through'.