



# Tribunal work is helping to make history

**T**HE National Native Title Tribunal's role in the native title system means it is the bearer of significant historic and cultural information about Australia's Indigenous peoples.

This store of information has developed as the result of the native title process, beginning with the registration of native title claims submitted by people seeking recognition of their traditional rights and interests over land and waters. In the years that follow the registration of each claim, many more related documents are submitted to and prepared by the Tribunal, providing important information about the history of that claim and the people who made it.

The Tribunal has recognised that this information has an important part to play in Australia's history – it tracks a process that can result in the recognition of the ongoing connection that Indigenous people have with the land on which we live.

The process culminates in the registration of determinations of native title and Indigenous land use agreements by the Registrar of the Tribunal.

For that reason, the Tribunal has undertaken a project with National Archives Australia (NAA) that identifies and retains many documents accrued over the 16 years since the *Native Title Act* came into operation.

The 'records authority' project, which



## NATIVE TITLE AND YOU

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

was initiated in 2009, ensures the Tribunal's work in native title is now more firmly established in the documentation of Australia's history.

The records authority sets out the requirements and guidelines for retaining core business records, and ensures that significant records are kept for historical, cultural and

educational reasons. Through the project, a large number of Tribunal records have been identified as 'retain as national archives', including many documents relating to stories about native title that have emerged since the High Court's Mabo judgments.

Among these are well-known native title cases, such as the Yorta Yorta People's claim in Victoria and New South Wales, which was launched in early 1994 – one of the first claims to be considered under the *Native Title Act*.

These important documents have provided a record of the Tribunal's role in the native title system and the processes it has devised and followed as law and practice changed and matured.

Tribunal staff take pride in knowing that documents they have worked on have been kept as records of this important and ongoing chapter in Australia's history.

Some documents have already been transferred to the NAA. Under the *Commonwealth Archives Act*, these records will be available for public access after they have been held for 30 years provided they do not fall into certain exemption categories as defined in section 33 of the Act.

● For more about the Tribunal's record authority project, see the July issue of the NAA's *Memento* magazine (page 28, Issue 39), available online [www.naa.gov.au](http://www.naa.gov.au)