

MEDIA RELEASE - HISTORIC EVENT – PILA NATURE RESERVE DETERMINATION OF NATIVE TITLE RIGHTS AND INTERESTS

On 15 June 2022, the Federal Court sat at Mina Mina waterhole close to Patjarr Community, approximately 170kms north of Warburton in Western Australia to recognise the exclusive native title rights and interests of the Traditional Owners of the Pila Nature Reserve. Justice Craig Colvin handed down the Consent Determination recognising exclusive native title rights and interests to the land and waters formerly known as Gibson Desert Nature Reserve, an area of approximately 18,900 km².

The claim area is located within the Gibson Desert, the 5th largest desert in Australia, the claim area is a remote environment which consists mostly of spinifex grasses, mulga, desert oak and undulating red sandhills and plains. The Reserve was established for the preservation of flora and fauna.

The Traditional Owners of the Pila Nature Reserve are members of the Western Desert Cultural Bloc (WDCB). The recognition of the Traditional Owners native title rights and interests over the reserve has been a long journey, ongoing since the early 2000's. Native title was recognised in the area surrounding the Pila Nature Reserve in 2005 but at that time under the *Native Title Act 1993 (Cth)* (NTA) native title was extinguished over the Reserve. In 2005, the traditional owners signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the then State Government to jointly manage the reserve and were working towards a legislative recognition over the Reserve in the form of an Indigenous Conservation Title, but a change of Government in 2013 saw the work on the Title discontinued.

In 2012 a compensation claim was filed in recognition of the loss of native title rights and interests in the Reserve area. After weeks of evidence the claim was withdrawn when the Federal Court accepted that a 1920's petroleum lease had extinguished any claim to compensation.

In October 2017 the State Government agreed to negotiating a compensation settlement, this Agreement was signed at a celebration at Mina Mina in October 2020. The Agreement allowed for a Determination on the basis of the amendment in the NTA that passed the new section 47C which allows for native title rights and interests to survive the granting of this Reserve.

This historic event is a culmination of that long journey to an outcome, that for the traditional owners of the Pila Nature Reserve, results in this important recognition Federal Court of Australia of their rights that they have held since time immemorial.

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