



Elderly traditional owner welcomes settlement of marathon land claim

Eileen Bonney, the most senior surviving claimant to the land around a remote Northern Territory community, has welcomed the resolution of a 44-year old land claim “while I’m still living”.

Today the Australian Parliament passed the legislation that settles the claim at long last.

Ms Bonney has been waiting for this day since the Central Land Council first lodged the Wakaya Alyawarre Land Claim 42 in 1980.

Since then the traditional owners won back two small parcels of the original claim area and agreed to withdraw the Canteen Creek township area from the rest.

In order to settle what is now known as the Wakaya-Alyawarre (Repeat) Land Claim No. 130 they consented to an agreement between the CLC and the Northern Territory Government that surrenders native title rights to the township area known as Canteen Creek.

The Indigenous Land Use Agreement is the outcome of exhaustive consultations over many years and has the support of both the native title holders and residents of Canteen Creek.

The CLC’s elected members acknowledged the rigorous and inclusive decision making process by certifying the agreement on 30 October 2019.

The agreement grants ordinary freehold title to some parts of the town to an Aboriginal land holding body, the Canteen Creek Landholding Aboriginal Corporation.

Under the agreement, the NT government also supports the granting of the remainder of the claim area as Aboriginal freehold land under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*.

“I am happy to see this settled for my children and all our families,” Ms Bonney said.

“It’s happened at last. I’m still here. I was strong, now I got weaker. I’m still right.

“The traditional owners all wanted to get this done for a long time. Too many of us have died waiting for this day.”

Ms Bonney said the resolution of the claim means her daughters can move to their homeland near Canteen Creek.

She is looking forward to a handback ceremony in the new year.

The Wakaya-Alyawarre (Repeat) land claim is one of the CLC’s last two outstanding claims under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act.

During its 50-year history the council has won back more than half of the land in the southern half of the NT for its traditional owners, and its 14 Aboriginal ranger teams help them to manage the land.

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