

22 September 2006

Ruddock throws truth overboard on Native Title

The Federal and West Australian Governments should stop scaremongering and start working constructively with the Nyoongar people in a way that honours their successful native title claim, Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR) said today.

ANTaR National Director, Gary Highland said it would be irresponsible for both governments to waste taxpayers' money through costly legal appeals before they had attempted to negotiate in good faith with the Nyoongar people and their land council.

Mr Highland said Federal Attorney General Philip Ruddock's comments that the successful decision could prevent public access to beaches and parklands were particularly disappointing.

"Mr Ruddock's statements about native title have about as much credibility as his earlier claims that asylum seekers were throwing their children overboard," he said.

"Australians have been once bitten and twice shy when it comes to claims of this nature by Minister Ruddock. His comments should be seen for what they are – a cynical attempt to whip up fear and hysteria for political gain."

Mr Highland said that the Attorney General's comments were out of step with those of the Aboriginal Social Justice Commissioner, Tom Calma as well as current and former National Indigenous Council Members, Wesley Aird and Warren Mundine.

"Mr Ruddock should listen to his own government appointed advisers when they tell him that the Nyoongar decision is an opportunity rather than a threat."

"Both the Federal and Western Australian Governments are fond of saying they support negotiated agreements on native title. They should match their rhetoric with action, accept the verdict of the Federal Court and negotiate with the Nyoongar people and their land council," Mr Highland said.

Mr Highland said the Nyoongar decision would give heart to Indigenous people right around Australia.

"The court has found what the Nyoongar people have always known – that they are the traditional owners of Perth and its surrounds and that their native title continues to exist in the area. The decision should open the way for constructive negotiations that will improve economic opportunities for Nyoongar people and give greater recognition to Indigenous culture," he said.

"The Nyoongar people and their land council should be congratulated for their historic and hard fought victory."

Media contact: Gary Highland on 0418 476 940.