

GUNDITJAMARA CLAIMANT COMMENT

Interview conducted by Jessica Weir with Gunditjmarra Elders Johnny Lovett & Euphemia Day on 30 March 2007 at Mount Eccles National Park South West Victoria, after the Federal Court consent determination which recognised the Gunditjmarra people's native title.

Johnny Lovett:

There was a time frame in which we needed to have the application in. We threw a blanket claim over a whole lot of the state which included other people's boundaries so in actual fact we all had to sit down later on but it was sort of "let's get the bread first and then sort the crumbs out after" and that's what we did do. It was such a long time coming, I at times wondered if it was ever going to eventuate and it caused a lot of friction within communities as well, and then we had the white fellow on the other side of the road singing out "what's native title about?" So we had to contend with that as well but all in all today it's been a really great day.



Above: Johnny Lovett and Euphemia Day.
Right: Darlot Creek Gunditjmarra Country.

When I look around and I see kids and adults that have never been here before in the Lake Condah area, in this area here, and this is their traditional country and their parents and grandchildren may have left here a hundred years ago. Today their people are here now and they know that they can walk back here at any time they want to and they can come back into the country that belongs to them and that they are officially recognised by the high courts of this country as belonging to it. That's one hell of a feeling, that's one hell of a feeling.

Euphemia Day: It's just unreal. We always knew this was our place and then for it to take so long for the government, and what we had to go through to fight for the right to be acknowledged that this is our place. And this government has never ever admitted that


there was an invasion in Australia! I mean this place wasn't an empty place we were always here, thousands of years. Johnny and my brother they know the stories and the kids all know the stories later on. But it is just so senseless, like they said today, our Dad came back from the first World War and wasn't allowed to get jobs. They were put on a mission, what I would call today a concentration camp, where they had to ask the manager to go away and get jobs and do all that, and yet they were picked to go to the first and second World Wars, and never been recognised as soldier settlements. The government cut up all their land and gave it to the squatters around our areas.

Johnny Lovett: Three thousand acres were cut up into soldier settlement blocks for returned soldiers and some of them never even fired a shot in anger. They ended up with the country that belonged to us, as farming land and things like that.

I suppose today's main thing is that I can die tomorrow knowing that I've left a legacy for one hell of a lot of people, for the rest of their lives. I am never going to see the amount of people that



are going to come back and put claim to country, because I won't live that long. But there'll be generations and generations and generations and that's mind blowing.



I think on a more sober note, it also puts local shires and councils on notice that they now have to deal with us as a people. They now have to negotiate with us and come through the proper channels instead of just thinking they can just go and dig this up and dig that up and do whatever they want to do. They now have to negotiate with us at a level that we have to come to an agreement. We have to be involved at last.

Jessica Weir: What was it like putting in a native title claim and coordinating all these negotiations?

Johnny Lovett: It was a little bit hard at times and there were times when you thought that you'd just get up and walk away and not come back to the meetings any more, no more negotiations or nothing, because the frustration of it was so intense at that time. You'd go away and then you'd have a break from that and then you'd come back a few days later and think yeah I'm ready to go again, let's do it, let's start negotiating again. Of course the state governments weren't too easy to deal with either, and you're talking to us who never had a full understanding of how the white system worked legally. All of a sudden we were dealing with Acts from parliament and you don't have to do that everyday. You and I talk about something and then we agree to do it together, we may shake hands and just agree to do it and then we go and do it. But when there are things that you want to do that constitutes an Act that you have to deal with, then it gets a little bit different.

Euphemia Day: When I was growing up on the Lake Condah mission, I was born there and our grandmothers were alive then and you knew about this government that would come and take the kids away and our grandmother if we went walking around

the mission she was always with us and we only had a boundary to go, we weren't allowed to go too far because that fear was still there and they didn't want us to say things either because of the repercussions that could happen to us. On the mission they weren't allowed – you lost your song and dance, the language that was taken away from us, so we weren't allowed to speak our language and the women made baskets and stuff but they had to be copied off the old people. My grandmothers were both in their nineties and I never ever heard them speak any language because they knew the consequences of that action.

So that was just so real and still is so real today of everything we do and for us it's mind blowing sitting in a place like this today, on our ground, on our land, forced by government from us, for them to say "yes this is your land". It's mind blowing.

Johnny Lovett: That in itself, the Federal Court sitting on our land, in this area here.

Euphemia Day: Dad would be amazed at that.

Johnny Lovett: Our elders would not have believed it.

Euphemia Day: They would be shocked. It is just something they would not believe.

Johnny Lovett: It's a big story and I suppose the most simplest terms that I can think of describing it would be to say that at last we have recognition of who we are and what it means to be known as the traditional owners of Gunditjmarra country. I think that's about it, as simple as I can put it.

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NTRU Project Report

Prescribed Body Corporate Project

Project report by Toni Bauman

The NTRU is carrying out a Prescribed Bodies Corporate project over the next two years in partnership with the Minerals Council of Australia, the Office of the Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations and the University of Melbourne. The Project aims to support the growing number of Prescribed Bodies Corporate (PBCs) established after native title determinations to hold and manage native title lands and waters. This will be carried out through



Workshop delegates in Canberra