

An interview with

ROBERT SINGLETON

DIRECTOR OF THE YANDRUWANDHA YAWARRAWARRKA TRADITIONAL LAND OWNERS CORPORATION



ROBERT SINGLETON IS A Yandruwandha Yawarrawarrka traditional owner from the Cooper Basin region in North-Eastern South Australia. While at the National Native Title Conference 2016, Rob gave AIATSIS some insight into the Yandruwandha Yawarrawarrka peoples' recent native title consent determination.

On the 16th of December last year, after an almost twenty year journey we were given our native title by consent. We had a ceremony on country, at a significant place in the Cooper Basin called the Cullyamurra Waterhole. All of our community were invited to attend, and there were some special guests invited; those who were with us on the journey - both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, such as stakeholders from the Cooper Basin oil, gas, and pastoral industries. They were around when we first commenced the process to get recognition of our native title, so we thought it was just the natural thing

for them to be a part of it. We've now got various agreements in place with those stakeholders, and I think without those partnerships we would have continued to struggle with some things; having them there was recognition of their investment into being partners with us.

We had some very insightful leaders that were the first people to register our claim around twenty years ago. They carried that baton, but twenty years is a long journey in anyone's language and unfortunately we lost some of those leaders. We've still got some strong leaders within our community; some of our Elders still have that strong sense of connection to country that they have passed onto our younger generations - from me right down to our really young ones, our kids and our grandkids - so acknowledging their struggle at our consent determination was important for us.

Being a Board Member of the Yandruwandha Yawarrawarrka Traditional Land Owners Corporation, I thought it was absolutely vital that we give recognition to those people that set us on this path. Whilst the twenty year journey had lots of blood, sweat and tears and we sadly lost some significant people, it was a journey

that culminated in recognition that it is our country, it always has been and always will be and we will do our utmost to preserve, protect and manage it the best we can. We will do this in partnership with other people in the pastoral industry, and we acknowledge that there is tourism in that sector as well, particularly around the Innamincka community. Mining and exploration is obviously not going anywhere in the near future so we have to form strong relationships and partnerships with those people. The National Parks and Wildlife of South Australia have also got a presence in that country; one of our community members is a National Parks Ranger working and living on country. There are areas of significance for us in relation to our lands and our waterholes and the National Parks representatives play a big part in managing that. The Coongie Lakes in our country are internationally recognized as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance and we now have in place the Malkumba Coongie Lakes Management plan which helps all of us, including the National Parks and Wildlife, Mining, Pastoralism and traditional owners; and ensures land management principles are applied. The plan is a good guiding document to make sure that we do our utmost in relation to land preservation and heritage protection.

We were a claimant group for the best part of twenty years, however, only recently in 2016 were we then recognised as a Prescribed Body Corporate (PBC) which brings some different challenges. Our business is not going to change dramatically, but we have to now think about more strategic goals and aspirations for our community. In order to figure out where to go from here, we need to set clear goals and find a pathway towards sustainability into the generations, not just into the near future, but making sure our kids and their kids and grandkids have got a legacy that will sustain them throughout the years. Some of our activities we will undertake will be centered around strategic direction planning and future goal setting. Some of that aspirational stuff is really front and centre to the thoughts of our community, but without some of those pathways being created for people, you run the risk of not being able to provide that secure future for those who come after us.

We've had a presence at the National Native Title Conference for six or eight years now. I was lucky enough to be part of a conference about seven years ago and I told my fellow directors and community that this forum is something everyone should get some degree of exposure to. It is a fantastic opportunity to network, and listen to other peoples' plights and struggles while also learning from their plans, successes and future goals. We are not here to reinvent the wheel; we want to make sure we do the right things in the smartest possible way and with the least amount of energy. One intrinsic thing within Aboriginal communities is that they share their good and bad stories, their struggles and achievements in business, and we acknowledge that other people have done this before us. We are more than happy to sit down and share our story, in turn, we get some pointers on possible directions and options we can take. It gives us a bit of a kick on and expedites that process about



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being a new player in the PBC arena by showing us where we need to put our energies and goals at. Having exposure to the National Native Title Conference has been instrumental because now we will go back and take new ideas and stories from other native title holders about their successes and places they found traction.

Due to the systematic removal from country back in the 1940s, 50s and 60s we were spread amongst several different states and jurisdictions. Because of this our old people have made their lives and completely dispersed into the wider Australian landscape. Some of our aspirations are to have some more permanent presence back on country, having the opportunity to build some infrastructure and some long term business opportunities, accommodation and

residential buildings on country to create the space for those who have a desire to return to country and to live either semi-permanently or permanently.

We certainly want to build a solid foundation in relation to our business opportunities, and we have some irons in the fire in that respect and they are starting to return some small dividends but we are at a very early stage. Post native title consent determination we want to do what we can to ramp some of that stuff up and create some opportunities for joint ventures, partnerships and minor contracts in the supply chain in amongst the pastoral and the mining exploration industries.

Previous page: Rob Singleton signing native title agreement at Cullyamurra Waterhole.
Credit: Andrew Beckworth, Native Title SA.
Above: Spinifex Savanna, Central Australia.
Credit: Thomas Schoch.