

Transcript

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 Program: **NT COUNTRY HOUR** Time: **12:26 PM**
 Compere: **LORNA PERRY** Summary ID: **W00036995951**
 Item: **DISCUSSION ABOUT LAND RIGHTS TO JABIRU.**

INTERVIEWEE: JUSTIN O'BRIEN, GUNDJEHMI ABORIGINAL CORPORATION

Demographics:	Male 16+	Female 16+	All people	ABs	GBs
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

LORNA PERRY: In other mining news, it's a good news day for traditional owners on the Kakadu National Park town of Jabiru.

An in-principle resolution has today recognised the Mirrar people's traditional ownership of the township.

The native title application for Jabiru was first lodged in 1997 - so, 12 years ago - making it one of the longest running native title cases in Australia.

Justin O'Brien is the executive officer of the Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation, and he joins us in the studio now.

Good afternoon.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Afternoon, Lorna.

LORNA PERRY: So, quite a significant day for the Aboriginal Corporation?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: It is. It's a historic day. It's - the Native Title Claim's been running now for, as you've said, 12 years. But the aspiration for a legal recognition of their ownership - and this is the Mirrar people of the town area - goes back at least 30 years.

LORNA PERRY: In-principle; that's what it says in all of the comments that we've seen. Is - that mean that it's not a hundred per cent, it's not a locked in deal?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: That's correct.

This is now - we need to implement the agreement. We've arrived at an in-principle agreement, as you said.

Now, certain actions have to be made by key parties, such as; the Australian Government needs to schedule the land of Jabiru as Aboriginal land. That requires a legislative amendment to the Aboriginal Land Rights Act.

So until that's done, the deal's not entirely complete.

LORNA PERRY: But it's a fairly safe thing to say, though, that Jabiru, the township, will be handed back to the traditional owners?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: All indications today are that that's going to happen in the new year.

LORNA PERRY: So, a long process, 12 years, I mean, that's not a new figure[laughs] for native title claims, it seems.

What's been the biggest hurdle to overcome in this journey?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: I think that the way the Native Title Act works, it's a very legal process, it's based on adversarial principles of the legal approach, and for a long time there have been - there's also been, fair to say, some doubt and mistrust on the sides of all parties.

What we've done here is snatch from the inevitability of a [pause] more litigation, a win-win for all parties.

LORNA PERRY: Does this mean that the township of Jabiru could change in the future?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: It won't mean much of a change to people living on the ground in Jabiru, immediately.

But what you'll see soon is that [coughs] because what this really does - the material impact on the ground will be; it provides security of tenure for everybody out there. It gives the town a lease on life that it's needed for a hell of a long time.

So, that will be of benefit to Indigenous interests, business interests, and to the extent that it plays an important role in service and other things. Important security and certainty for government too.

LORNA PERRY:

And that's obviously looking towards the end of the current uranium mine life of ERA. It's looking at 2026. What's been the response of the company towards this decision?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN:

The company's been - they've welcomed it. They issued a statement today, a separate statement to ours but it's along the same lines.

And it's probably opportune to say that the - it's an important relationship development, this, in that - in the sense that the company has long and fairly strongly supported the Mirrar aspiration for land rights at Jabiru, and without that consistent support we probably wouldn't be here today.

Having said that, though, it's also evidence, I think, of a - the effectiveness of the National Native Title Tribunal and the willingness of other parties, including the Director of National Parks in the Northern Territory Government, and other parts of the Commonwealth Government, to mediate this rather than go to court.

LORNA PERRY:

Well, thanks so much for coming into the studio today. A very significant day for you. Thanks very much.



JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Thank you.

LORNA PERRY: That was Justin O'Brien, who's the executive director.

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ABs = Managers, administrators, professions. GBs = Grocery buyers.
