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MEDIA RELEASE

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Native title recognition a win for Budjiti People

The Federal Court of Australia has today recognised native title over lands and waters spanning more than 16,700km² in Queensland's south-west corner, officially naming the Budjiti People as Traditional Owners and native title holders.

Held at the iconic Currawinya National Park near Hungerford, the remote sitting of the Federal Court solemnised the successful resolution of the Budjiti People's long-running claim for native title rights, first lodged on 20 February 2007.

The claim area totals 16,730km² and includes a number of Indigenous landmarks significant to the Budjiti People, including the Caiwarro watering hole, the Currawinya Lakes, Boorara Lakes and Dynevor Lakes.

Queensland South Native Title Services' Principal Legal Officer Tim Wishart says the consent determination is a well-deserved win for the Budjiti People.

"Today's outcome is a great achievement for the Budjiti People, whose connection to the land and waters around the Paroo River tells a fascinating story throughout history," Mr Wishart says.

"Indigenous custom among the Budjiti People speaks of *moudda nguddah*, the rainbow serpent who protects the vast network of waterholes and rivers spanning the Murray Darling Basin.

"As a river people, gaining recognition of native title over these culturally renowned bodies of water is an important milestone for the Budjiti People, and a testament to their determination and commitment in pursuing their native title claim."

During proceedings, a preservation of evidence hearing in March 2010 involved a number of site visits to Indigenous landmarks in the claim area, including the Woolshed in Currawinya National Park, where the Federal Court today handed down its decision.

"Currawinya National Park is recognised for its natural and rugged beauty, from The Granites rock formations to the serene waters of the Paroo River, so it is fitting that the Budjiti People should have their native title rights determined by the Hon Justice Mansfield on familiar country," Mr Wishart says.

"On behalf of QSNTS, I congratulate the Budjiti People on gaining recognition as Traditional Owners and native title holders in this beautiful part of Queensland."

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MEDIA BACKGROUND – BUDJITI PEOPLE

Claim History

The Budjiti People first filed their native title claim with the Federal Court of Australia on 20 February 2007, which was later registered by the National Native Title Tribunal on 10 July 2007.

The significant parties to the claim include:

1. The State of Queensland;
2. Paroo and Bulloo Shire Councils;
3. Ergon Energy Corporation Limited;
4. Telstra Corporation Limited; and
5. Several mining proponents (including but not limited to):
 - a. Santos Limited;
 - b. Origin Energy CSG Limited; and
 - c. Vamgas Pty Limited.

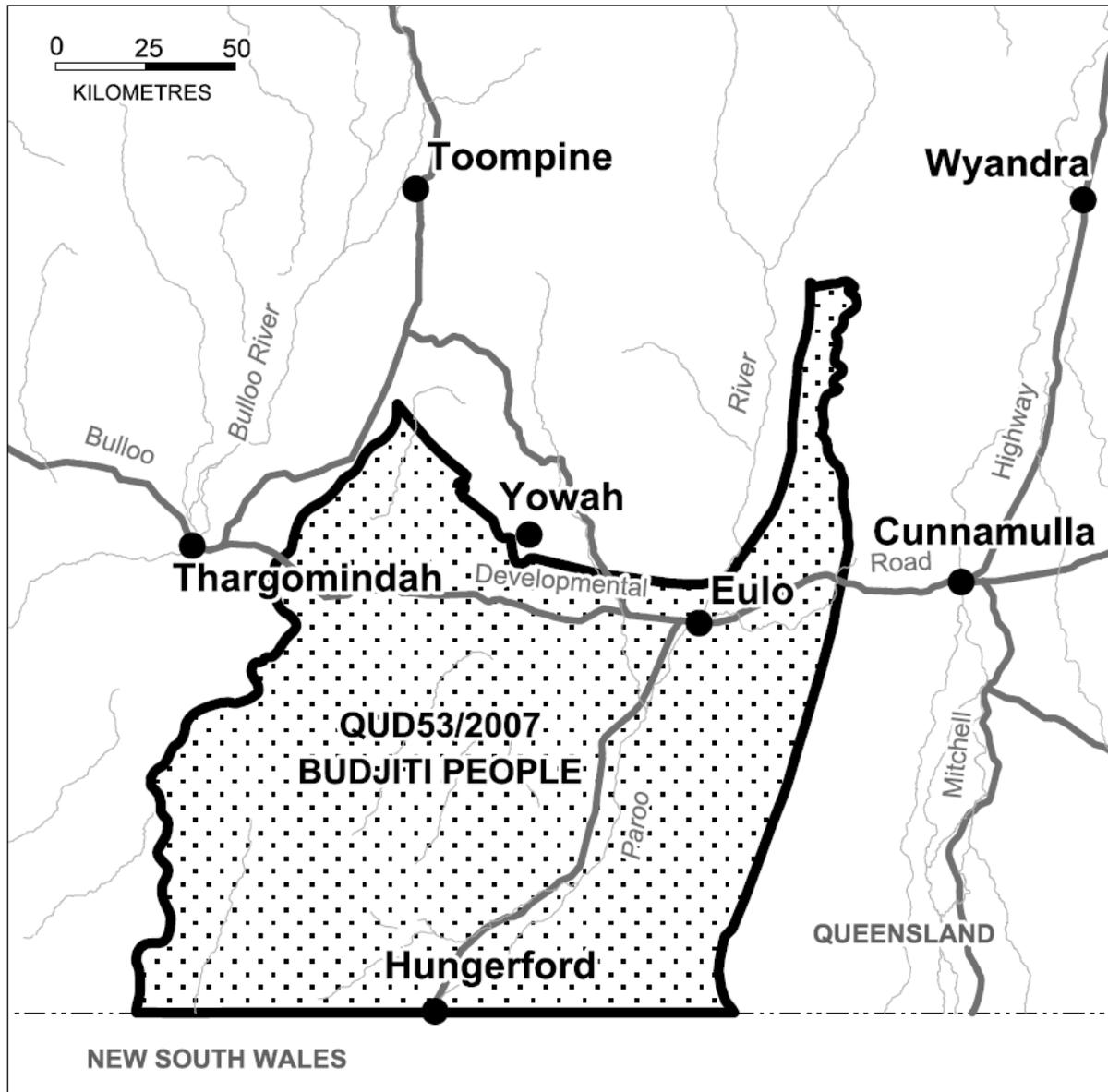
The Federal Court originally listed the Budjiti People's claim for trial in March 2010, however after significant negotiations between all parties, a preservation of evidence hearing was instead ordered.

The preservation of evidence hearing took place from 11 to 15 August 2010 and involved a number of site visits to significant landmarks around the Budjiti People's claim area, including the Caiwarro waterhole, The Granites, the old Homestead and Woolsheds at Currawinya National Park as well as the Quinine trees, Top Camp and the Paroo River Bridge at Eulo.

Key Dates

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| 20 February 2007: | Native title determination application filed with the Federal Court; |
| 10 July 2007: | Native title claim entered on register by National Native Title Tribunal; |
| 11-15 August 2014: | Preservation of evidence hearing held on country before Justice Mansfield; |
| 10 October 2015: | State accepted connection of Budjiti People to country and were prepared to enter into substantive negotiations; |
| 2 November 2014: | Key claim group authorisation meetings held; |
| 23 March 2015: | Budjiti Aboriginal Corporation Registered Native Title Body Corporate (RNTBC) registered; |
| 23 June 2015: | Consent determination hearing held at Currawinya National Park before Justice Mansfield of the Federal Court of Australia, recognising native title rights of the Budjiti People. |

Claim Area Map



Connection to Country

The Budjiti People's claim area covers 16,730km² in the Bulloo and Paroo Shire Councils, located in the south-west region of Queensland and encompassing the towns of Eulo and Hungerford. Describing themselves as a river people from the Paroo area, the Budjiti People have maintained a connection to the network of rivers and watering holes linked to the Murray Darling.

Moudda Nguddah

Significant to the Budjiti People's custom is the story of *moudda nguddah*, the serpent spirit who created and protects the bodies of water in the determination area. It is said that *moudda nguddah* moves between rivers and watering holes using tunnels and leaving sinkholes that fill with water.

The story has prevailed from generation to generation, leading the Budjiti People to 'follow the rules' when *moudda nguddah* was near.

Currawinya National Park

Currawinya National Park is home to several Indigenous landmarks, including the Granites rock formations, the Homestead and the Woolsheds.

Among Budjiti People, men and women were each prohibited from visiting some places. The Granites were prohibited to the women of the Budjiti People, and it is said that the spirits would make them sick if they broke the rules.

Caiwarro

The Caiwarro watering hole is a place of significance to the Budjiti People as it is home to a family of stone people comprising a man, woman and child who warn of when a flood is coming. When the stone man's head appears above the level of water, it is a rule among the Budjiti People that a flood will follow.

Only Budjiti People are permitted to leap from the shoulders of the stone people at Caiwarro, but *moudda nguddah* could also be found there. When rowing boats, *moudda nguddah* would sometimes stop the boats from moving and the Budjiti People who hold matches to the water to scare *moudda nguddah* away.

Native Title Rights and Interests

Achieving a native title determination protects the rights and interests of the Budjiti People in their traditional lands and water. The non-exclusive rights and interests contained within the Budjiti People's native title determination agreement include the right to:

1. access, be present on, move about on and travel over the application area;
2. camp, and live temporarily on the application area as part of camping, and for that purpose build temporary shelters;

3. hunt, fish and gather on the land and waters of the application area for personal, domestic and non-commercial communal purposes;
4. take, use, share and exchange natural resources from the land and waters of the application area for personal, domestic and non-commercial communal purposes;
5. take and use the water of the application area for personal, domestic and non-commercial communal purposes;
6. light fires on the application area for domestic purposes including cooking, but not for the purpose of hunting or clearing vegetation;
7. conduct ceremonies and hold meetings on the application area;
8. teach on the area the physical and spiritual aspects of the application area;
9. maintain places of importance and areas of significance to the native title holders under their traditional laws and customs, and protect those places and areas from physical harm;
10. be buried and bury native title holders within the application area; and
11. be accompanied onto the application area by certain non-native title holders, being:
 - a. spouses and other immediate family members of native title holders, pursuant to the exercise of traditional laws and customs; and
 - b. people required under the traditional laws acknowledged and traditional customs observed by the native title holders for the performance of, or participation in, ceremonies.