



WDLAC BACK IN MARTU HANDS

The Registrar of Indigenous Corporations, Anthony Beven, today announced the end of the special administration at the Western Desert Lands Aboriginal Corporation (Jamukurnu-Yapalikunu) RNTBC (WDLAC).

WDLAC holds and manages the native title rights and interests of the Martu people, including exclusive use, occupation, possession and control of 136,000 square kilometres in the central western desert region of Western Australia.

In July 2015 Jack James and Paula Cowan from the Perth-based firm of Palisade Business Consulting were appointed by the Registrar as special administrators after an examination revealed concerns about WDLAC's governance standards and financial performance.

'WDLAC is an important native title corporation delivering cultural, social and economic benefits for the Martu people,' said Mr Beven. 'But from July 2013 it was experiencing difficulties that it could not resolve on its own.'

'This has been a particularly successful special administration. In just seven months the special administrators, in close consultation with the members, have managed to turn WDLAC's fortunes around and set it on a firm and steady course for the future.'

The special administrators have:

- significantly reduced WDLAC's operating costs and returned it to profitability. In the 2013–14 financial year WDLAC incurred a \$1.8 million loss followed by a \$2.4 million loss in 2014–15. In a significant turnaround WDLAC recorded an operating surplus of \$348,044 in the first half of the 2015–16 financial year while under special administration
- concluded and registered an Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) with Newcrest Mining Limited which will provide the Martu people with \$18 million and employment and business opportunities over the next six years. The ILUA had been under negotiation for eight years
- established arrangements for an independent trustee to manage approximately 75 per cent of the funds received under the Newcrest ILUA
- re-established the trust of the traditional owners and Martu communities in WDLAC and rebuilt relationships with WDLAC's major stakeholders
- reviewed WDLAC's operations and disposed of unprofitable business ventures
- introduced innovative new management and service arrangements for WDLAC. From 1 July 2012 to 30 June 2015 WDLAC incurred costs of \$4,721,145 for a CEO, chief financial officer and legal services. The special administrators have engaged the services of a native title representative body, Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation, to provide management, administration, accounting and legal services to WDLAC at one tenth of the cost of the previous arrangements.

- redirected savings from the reduction in administration and management costs to create a new liaison officer position in the community of Parngurr for a Martu person
- appointed a smaller board of new directors, including in a first for WDLAC, an independent director. The new member directors are representatives of the six areas of country within the Martu determination area—Karlamyingurrara, Ngayunanalku, Pilakaja, Pitijikarli, Rirrakaja and Walakaja. They are:
 - James Berringal
 - Kennedy Finlay
 - Kerry Kelly
 - Lindsay Robinson
 - Desmond Taylor
 - Kenny Thomas

The independent specialist director appointed by the special administrators is Joe Fardin, who holds a Master of Laws and is currently enrolled in a PhD course researching mining agreements with Indigenous groups. Mr Fardin has had a career in the native title and mining sectors since 2004.

- reviewed and made several important changes to the corporation’s rule book, including embedding improved reporting to members and directors.

‘The WDLAC of today is unrecognisable from the WDLAC of just seven months ago,’ said Mr Beven. ‘I would like to congratulate the special administrators, Jack James and Paula Cowan, for transforming WDLAC. It is now in a strong position to protect the native title rights and interests of the Martu people and deliver better outcomes.’

The Registrar will monitor the corporation closely over the next 12 months and will provide corporate governance training to the new directors in coming months.

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Special administrators

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