



CENTRAL DESERT
— NATIVE TITLE SERVICES —

HOMEcoming FOR UPURLI UPURLI NGURATJA'S NATIVE TITLE HOLDERS

Tuesday November 28, 2023

A special event has drawn more than 200 people back to Cundeelee, for a date they will remember always. On Tuesday 28th November, they travelled back home to be recognised as the Native Title holders of the Urpurli Urpurli Nguratja consent determination.

While Cundeelee and the surrounding area may appear as a dot on a map 160km east of Kalgoorlie, it holds great significance to native title holders, valuable resources sort by many others, and a trove of stories to feed Australian history.

Due to the movement of people across the desert throughout history, a diverse group of 49 families claim native title here. The nuclear bomb testing in Maralinga and Emu Flat in, in South Australia, saw many people forced off their country. In addition to this, the building of the Indian Pacific Railway, Karonie ration depot and Cundeelee Mission were factors that saw many people move from surrounding areas onto the determination area.

Many of the Traditional Owners have spent at least part of their lives living within the claim area, mostly at Cundeelee and Coonana, or were born there. They are members of the 'Western Desert Cultural Bloc', connected to each other and the claim area through the *tjukurrpa* ("the Dreaming" or "the Law"). Urpurli Urpurli Nguratja means 'belonging to the country of the tadpoles' and relates to a large rockhole near Cundeelee that is central to the cultural history of the claim area.

Native Title holder Debbie Hansen travelled more than 600km from Tjuntjuntjara for this day that has been a long time coming since being moved on from her childhood home and place where their old people rest.



“All these years waiting since we were moved on when the water ran out. Now being on country will enable us to pass *tjukurrpa* on the appropriate people in the appropriate way. The next generation will be to learn about it on country. To bond with country. We want to look after it and look after the people who came from spinifex country who are buried there,” she said.

“I’m really happy that my kids and grandkids will be able to be recognised and have a place to connect, learn and try to heal our country.”

The determination area includes Cundeelee Reserve, Coonana Reserve, Queen Victoria A Class Nature Reserve, significant sites and *tjukurrpa* (dreaming). The vicinity of Mulga Rock there is the Yellow Sandplain Priority Ecological Community, known as one of the most pristine areas in the Great Victoria Desert. It is home to the endangered Sandhill Dunnart.

It is country rich in sandalwood. Cundeelee Mission played its part in feeding the overseas market demand operating a license utilising Aboriginal labour for rations and a little pay, if lucky.

Native Title over Urpurli Upurli Nguratja gives present day proponents certainty regarding who the right people are to talk to for the business they wish to do on country.

Native Title Holder Daniel Steve Sinclair said people know and understand why what you do on country and to country is so important, for all of us.

“Recognition is important to be able to protect the areas and country and looking after it, we want to work together with people coming here and look after the country,” he said.

“For a long time, the wrong people have been speaking for our country, and saying things are ok to happen. Now the right people can speak for our country, and make sure anyone coming on country won’t get into trouble. Traditional Owners need to know what is happening.



“We can’t follow the stories when they get damaged and destroyed, if we don’t protect it, we lose our culture which is important for our younger generation to learn and be guided by. Getting our determination means we can go back to country and teach our young generations.”

While the Urpurli Upurli Nguratja has progressed comparatively quickly since Central Desert Native Title Services filed for claimants in December 2020, it has been an intense and emotional journey for all involved to resolve overlaps and representation for country.

Central Desert Native Title Services Chief Executive Officer Johanna Ramsay said the determination marks just the start of the next exciting and challenging phase for the families.

“Central Desert is proud to have been able to support the claimants on what has been an emotional journey for them. It is great to see them be able to come ‘home’ to Cundeelee to mark this important occasion. We look forward to seeing what they choose to carve out for their future, and we will be alongside them if they choose.”

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About Central Desert Native Title Services:

Central Desert Native Title Services Ltd (Central Desert) is a recognised native title service provider for the native title claimants and holders of the central desert region of Western Australia. CDNTS is funded by the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) to carry out functions under the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth) (**NTA**).

We work in partnership with Aboriginal People of the Central Desert as they shape a self-determined future of independence, control and connection to Country, Culture and Community.

Media contact – Kylie Stirk, Communications Manager, email kyliestirk@centraldesert.org.au or mobile 0417 704 114