

KENBI LAND CLAIM

to vacant crown land in the Cox
Peninsula Bynoe Harbour and Port
Patterson areas of the Northern
Territory of Australia

by

The Northern Land Council on behalf
of the traditional owners

Prepared by

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During the years since Aborigines first indicated interest in a formal land claim to the Cox Peninsula and off-shore islands, a number of knowledgeable traditional owners and others who have demonstrated their concern for Aboriginal land rights have died. Their names and the knowledge they handed on remain in this claim book, despite the traditional taboo on some of these matters. We have done this with the consent of surviving kin because we were told those dead people would have wanted that.

Thus Dolly Garinyee and Topsy Karamana died in 1973, Victor Williams in 1977, Tommy Lyons, or Imabulg, in 1978 and, most recently, Johnny Fejo in November, 1979.

In 1979 Professor A.P. Elkin, who had a long interest in and acquaintance with the area, also died.

To these, and to all others who did not live to participate as they would have wished in the formal claim hearing, this book is dedicated.

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PREFACE

This land claim documents a human heritage of interest to all Australians. For larger southern cities like Sydney and Melbourne, it may well be too late to retrieve the heritage keyed in the landscape - a heritage of the first Australians. For Darwin it is not too late.

The descendants of the first inhabitants in the area still live among and near the later ones. Much of the ancient knowledge is still known, but not to non-Aborigines, who probably are not aware that it exists.

Rapid Creek is called Gurinbey, Nightcliff is Madjamarabali, Parap is Bilawara - (see also Bunji, May 1973). Emery Point is two Aboriginal sites, Gundal and Madlamaning (Australia 1975b). Garamalal is the Darwin peninsula (Lockwood 1968:102 and, independently, George Munggalu). Meyrang is the name for East Point (Norman Harris, claimant).

The recording and transmission of this heritage is a task that all Darwin people should be interested in. The information in this claim book for Cox Peninsula and the nearby islands is but a beginning*. Those who have been privileged to see the landscape through Aborigine eyes realise how this knowledge brings life to it.

Local Aborigines share more interests, too, with local non-Aborigines. Important to the future of both is the conservation of the natural species of land, sea and reefs of the area. Controlled conservation by joint parties could involve the regulated use of

* In 1960 young people at Belyuen (or Delissaville as it used to be known) made a collection of traditional stories and dedicated it to Wagaidj children (see Appendix 3). Much more needs to be done so that all children in the area can grow up sharing the heritage.

the area for tourism and subsistence activities among others.

Local Aboriginal people have indicated to us the sites on the peninsula and islands which they regard with differing degrees of importance. These are of interest, too, to Australians in general, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. The responsibility for their safe-keeping is on all who live near them. A wider responsibility exists too for the government of the Northern Territory who are seeking to preserve the cultural and historical past for future generations of Territorians.

Acknowledgements

Preparing a land claim book is an exhausting business. No one involved at any level could deny this. It is also an exciting and rewarding experience shared with and made possible by others.

No researcher can prepare a claim alone. We are indebted to many who participated in getting this claim book ready.

Above and beyond all others we pay tribute to the traditional owners and their kin and affines who kept us "company" throughout. These include the people of Bagot, Balgal, Belyuen, Berry Springs, Flagon Creek, Humpty Doo, Kalalak, Railway Dam and Tree Point. We thank too those Larrakia and Wagaidj people who taught us all we have tried to record here. Some people require a special mention: Alice Djarug, Betty Bilawug, George Munggalu, Lorna Tennant, Margaret Rivers, Maudie Bennett and Peggy Wilson. Any errors are the result of our inadequacies and not theirs.

Our only contribution to their claim is a measure of literacy. As this is just a matter of historical circumstances and no inborn talent, it is our hope that claimants of the future will acquire this habit and document their own claims. For only then will the written material be shaped by characteristics which come from within the culture, characteristics which derive from a deep and close understanding that outsiders can only glimpse.

In our archival work we prevailed upon the good will of the staff of the following bodies: the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies; the Australian Archives in Canberra and Darwin; the State Library of South Australia and the South Australian Museum; the National Library in Canberra; the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia (South Australian Branch); the Mitchell Library in Sydney; the State Archives, Battye Library in Perth; the archives of the Society of Jesus, Hawthorn, Victoria; the library and Aboriginal Population Records section of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in Darwin; the Darwin Community College Library and the Darwin Historical Society. Without the very dedicated and efficient assistance of Ros Fraser who is affiliated with the Australian Archives, the Australian Institute of Aborigines and the Northern Land Council, our archival research and documentation would have been very much the poorer.

We were assisted throughout our field research by the staff of government departments in Darwin and at Belyuen: especially Margaret Doherty (née Lyons), Olive Howes, Brian Reid and Edith Tilley of the Department of Health and Joyce Edwards and Kyran Lynch of the Department of Education. The Surveyor-General of the Northern Territory, Peter Wells, assisted us to date Aboriginal names on extant maps. His staff in map sales were always willing to help us find the maps we needed.

The Department of Aboriginal Affairs staff in Darwin were always helpful and, in particular, Tony Tapsell and Bill Ivory, who gave valuable comments based on their previous work in the area.

Our thanks are due to the support of all the Northern Land Council staff, especially Norrie Mitchell, Dehne McLaughlin, Bonnie Fraser, Hazel Stevens and John Dymock.

A NOTE ON SPELLING OF ABORIGINAL WORDS

Representation of Aboriginal language material poses a number of problems for this claim book. Within the claim area a number of distinct Aboriginal languages are used and we need to be able to write down some words from these languages especially Larrakia and Wadjiginy (Wagaidj). In some other areas of the Northern Territory Aboriginal communities have adopted spelling systems (practical orthographies) for local languages as means to establishing literacy in their own languages. As yet there are no such programmes in operation in the Darwin area.

Only a limited amount of material has to be represented here. We therefore propose to adopt a compromise orthography which sacrifices some phonetic precision for greater readability. One vowel sound which appears in some words in both Larrakia and Wadjiginy also appears in German e.g. Göthe (Goethe) but not in English (in phonetic terms this is called a mid-high front rounded vowel). This vowel could have been represented as ö or oe but we use er here since this approximates the sound for those used to reading English. Another convention adopted here is the use of initial capital letters for proper nouns: place names, group names and personal names.

Many sounds in Aboriginal languages are very similar to those found in English but can appear in different positions in a word. For example, English has the ng sound as in "singing" which can occur at the end of the word or in the middle. Aboriginal languages also have this ng sound but it can appear at the beginning of words as well as in the place name Ngambarrngayidj (on the east coast of Indian Island). Another example is the ny sound as in "canyon"

which can appear at the end of words in Aboriginal languages as in the language name Wadjiginy. The ny at the end of this word should not be pronounced as in "many".

Vowels are especially problematic. Current English spelling is far from ideal in that although it has over twenty distinct vowel sounds there are only five vowel symbols to represent them. A single vowel symbol can be pronounced in a number of ways, for example, the symbol "u" in English "put" and "but". On the other hand a single vowel sound can be represented by quite different symbols or combinations of symbols, for example, "air", "mare", pear", "where", "Claire" etc.

When reading the Aboriginal language material it should be borne in mind that although the letters used are the same as for English they have different sound values. In the group name Wagaidj the first vowel (underlined) can be pronounced as in the English words "putt", "part", "pot" and "port". This range of pronunciations signals quite different meanings in English - "part" is different from "port" - but makes no difference to this Aboriginal word.

The symbols* to be used are as follows:

b	d	rd	dj	g
v				
m	n	rn	ny	ng
	l	rl		
w			y	
	r			
	rr			
i	e	a	u	(er)

*The arrangement of sounds follows common linguistic practice.

b, d, g, v, m, n, l, w, y and r can be pronounced as in English; dj as for English "jug" or "George"; ny as in "canyon", "news" but not as in "many". rd, rn, rl are retroflex sounds which involve the tip of the tongue being further back than for the corresponding sounds d, n, l. rr is a trill as heard in Scots English. Care should be taken with ng - in English this combination represents a number of quite different sound combinations:

singer

finger

Bren-gun

mangy

The underlined ng in "singer" is represented in this claim book by ng as in Nungiyil (place name) while the ng in "finger" would be represented by ngg as in danggalaba "crocodile".

The vowel symbols can be pronounced as follows:

i as in "sit" or "seat"

e as in "when" or "where"

a as in "putt" "port" "part" "pot"

u as in "put" "boot"

er roughly as in "per" - more accurately as in Götter "gods" in German.

There are two diphthongs:

ui as in maruidj "crab sp" roughly as in "boy"

ai as in Wagaidj as in "night" or "eye"

Two main exceptions have been made to the principles outlined above: the words Larrakia and Kiuk. If the conventions were followed these two language names would be spelt: Laragiya and Giyug. "Larrakia" is one of the spellings which frequently occurs in the considerable literature dealing with the

Aborigines of the claim area. "Kiuk" is a spelling which is familiar to the people originally centred on Peron Island (- the Kiuk-) and is adopted for that reason.

The spelling of Aboriginal material used in this claim book should not be regarded as the only one that is acceptable. We have striven to record the knowledge of the Cox Peninsula Aborigines accurately but, without doubt, there are errors for which we take responsibility. There are many quite different ways the material could have been written down; for example there are more than a dozen spellings of Larrakia. Who is to say which one is "correct"? Certainly the spelling used to record information about the claim area by one of the traditional owners, Olga Singh (see Appendix 2) is equally valid. Her statement may form the basis for further transmission of traditional knowledge through the new medium of writing.

The Wadjiginy word "kenbi" as a name for the claim area refers to a mythological or "dreaming" track which links the principal islands in the area to the Cox Peninsula. It is not in any way a name which refers to a place or places in the claim area, the borders of which are determined by the limits of unalienated Crown land in that region, not by Aboriginal mythology.

"Kenbi" in the Wadjiginy language means crocodile, tunnel, bamboo. The principal common spiritual affiliation of the traditional owners is also the crocodile.

We use the expression "Kenbi claim area" as a short title - the other, longer title appears on the title page of this claim book.

