



AN INTERVIEW WITH GAIL REYNOLDS-ADAMSON AND ANNIE DABB

Esperance Tjaltjraak Native Title Aboriginal Corporation

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GAIL REYNOLDS-ADAMSON AND Annie Dabb are Esperance Nyungar native title holders from the south east coast of Western Australia. They are the Co-chairpersons of the Esperance Tjaltjraak Native Title Aboriginal Corporation; the PBC set up to manage their native title rights and interests.

Their journey to achieve their native title rights and interests was a long and drawn out process. Their native title claim was first filed in 1996 and took 18 years to achieve a consent determination. The Esperance Nyungar People were awarded native title in March 2014 over approximately 28,900 square kilometres. Sadly, a lot of the elders who had begun the native title process had passed away by the time their native title was recognised. Annie Dabb said "It was a long process...and the saddest thing is they [the elders who began the process] never got to be with us on the day of getting native title, of the handing over of our country".

For the Esperance Nyungar People, getting their native title was not about money, it was about



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Gail Reynolds-Adamson

their land, their culture and their heritage. Gail Reynolds-Adamson said "it is about getting our land and protecting our land. It is taking our children out [on country] and continuing our culture into future generations and you can't do that if you don't have your land".

The Esperance Tjaltjraak Native Title Aboriginal Corporation is planning to implement a number of community and economic development programs to help the wellbeing of the community and to provide employment opportunities. The aim is also to empower the

Above: Gail Reynolds-Adamson and Annie Dabb at the Native Title Conference 2015.

Photo credit: John Paul Janke

young people in the community to be leaders and to provide positive employment and business pathways for the community. The entities that they are planning to set up are wholly owned by the PBC but will still support individuals wanting to become entrepreneurs and run their own businesses.

Esperance is an absolutely beautiful area of Western Australia with some of the best beaches in the world. The PBC has identified that Esperance does not have any 5 star resorts and believes that such a development may be an opportunity for the native title holders and they plan to look at the possibilities of engaging with an investor to develop on the land. Such an investment will enable local Aboriginal people to be trained in a range of areas to run a resort, such as customer service, domestic services, hospitality and much more.

The PBC Board is concerned that there isn't a lot in Esperance for kids to be inspired to stay and work. As a result they leave to go to other places to work, or those that stay and don't have a job to go into often get caught up in the cycle of drugs and alcohol and often at a young age start making their own families. So by having these businesses up and running, the PBC Board hopes that there will be opportunities for employment for the young.



As well as getting the young people involved in the process, the biggest challenge for the Esperance Tjaltjraak PBC is funding. They want to move forward with their business ideas, but they don't have the money to do it. As Annie Dabb stated "We have all these great ideas about what we want to do, but we just can't take that next step". They want to become economically independent from Government, but that is where their struggle lies, how to approach or access other sources of funding. This is a challenge that many PBCs face.

As part of the native title settlement, the State Government and the Esperance Nyungar People also negotiated an Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ENILUA) as a component of the consent determination package. The ENILUA provides a financial benefits package to assist the native title holders in setting up the PBC, and land holdings for economic, cultural, residential and/or social purposes. The other concern, however, is being able to pay for the taxes and rates on the land that they are entitled to under the ENILUA, especially given they have no income at present to support them. As Gail Reynolds-Adamson revealed:

...as far as the land is concerned, the biggest challenge we have is being able to look at it to see what the viability of keeping that land and developing it for either cultural reasons or commercial reasons. If we view that land and we find that it is not going to be a viable piece of land, we are obviously not going to take it on. Because when we take on any land that's been given to us by the State, we have to pay rates and taxes and all of those things, but we don't have any income stream to pay for it. So for us the sad part about it is, that we don't want to say no to the land that has been given to us, but if we say yes to all of it, the day we do that, we may go into liquidation, because we have no way, at this particular to pay for it.

The Esperance Nyungar People therefore hope that the return of land does not become a double-edged sword – they get the land back, but they might not be able to support it and so they are worried it will be taken off them again.

Gail Reynolds-Adamson and Annie Dabb co-presented a paper at the AIATSIS Native Title Conference in Port Douglas in June 2015. They presented on the Esperance Nyungar ILUA. It was their first time at the conference and it opened their eyes to the experiences of other native title groups. When asked to comment on their experience at the conference they said:

I see a lot of things that other people have done that I think 'ooh, that's good, we can take that back home and try that.' Or 'we can go through that avenue to try and get some money'. They have good ideas here and I have really enjoyed it. For me, being over in such an area as we are, sort of isolated, I come here and say that we thought we were all alone with this one problem, and yet we find here that there are a lot of people that have the same problem that we are going through.

Annie Dabb, Native Title Conference Interview 2015

The AIATSIS conference for us has also been an eye opener for the challenges that other Aboriginal groups faced which are very similar to our challenges. And in saying that, if we had the ability to be sent to these conferences during our negotiation phase and the committee that was chosen was chosen to come here and listen to these talks, I think our negotiations would have taken a completely different path to what it is/ had been in the past.

Gail Reynolds-Adamson,
Native Title Conference Interview 2015

Far left: Lucky Bay, Cape Legrand National Park.

Photo credit: Dan Paris.

Below: Gentle Creek, Merivale.

Photo credit: Dan Paris.

Bottom: The Tjaltjraak tree – pronounced Dulurak; and is the aboriginal name of the bluegum tree native to the area and means 'glow in the dark'.

Photo credit: Dan Paris.

