



Rirratjingu Aboriginal Corporation

Media Release

Historic High Court Decision Upholds Rirratjingu Land Rights – A Major Legal and Cultural Victory

On 12 March 2024, the High Court of Australia handed down a historic decision, dismissing the Commonwealth Government's appeal to block the payment of Native Title compensation to Traditional Owners in East Arnhem Land. The decision marks a significant legal and moral victory for the Rirratjingu people, reinforcing their long-standing position on land justice and cultural sovereignty.

Rirratjingu Patron and former Chair, Bakamumu Marika AM, reflected on the outcome: *"Dhuka yarranytjun bukmakku Yolngu ma ngarru nyena mawayanga burrmidinga romnga. This means creating a pathway for all Yolngu to live in order to have peace, harmony and justice."*

"This is a powerful moment for the Rirratjingu people — one that affirms our rightful place as custodians of our land. It continues the legacy of our fathers and grandfathers who fought for control, justice, and respect on our own terms."

"This ruling is bittersweet. We honour those elders who are no longer with us, who dreamed of this day and laid the groundwork for our fight."

"This isn't just about compensation. It is about justice. About acknowledging the real cost of dispossession, asserting our economic and cultural independence, and strengthening the foundation of our future through land rights."

The High Court's decision reaffirmed that the Commonwealth had no right to take the Rirratjingu people's land without just terms — a principle protected under the Australian Constitution.

The judgment represented a continuation of the struggle that began with the 1963 Bark Petitions and the 1971 Milirrpum v Nabalco case — both milestones where Rirratjingu voices played a central and defining role in the national land rights movement.

This outcome not only vindicates decades of advocacy but sets a national precedent that confirms Native Title is a form of property and must be respected by the highest laws in the country.

"This is a win for all Traditional Owners, but especially for the Rirratjingu clan. We stood tall in the High Court as equals. This decision strengthens our hand as we plan for the future, a future where our land, our people, and our governance are respected."

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