

Traditional Owners stand up to US miner in Sydney protest

Arnhem Land Traditional Owners have forced US oil and gas company Paltar to meet with them by travelling to the firm's Australian headquarters in Sydney last Friday to protest about planned mining operations by the company off the coast of their land.

Five Arnhem Land Traditional Owners, Eddie Mason, Rosita Ankin, Alice Eather Williams, Elston Maxwell and Ross Brian travelled to Sydney for the protest.

Until the Sydney protest Paltar had steadfastly refused to talk to the Traditional Owners about its near shore drilling plans the Traditional Owners claim threatens their food, water and Culture. The firm agreed to a meeting only after the Traditional Owners said they were coming to Sydney.

The Traditional Owners asked Paltar to be good corporate citizens and withdraw the permit applications and the company issued a press statement saying it would consult with Traditional Owners.

The Traditional Owners are now putting together a bark petition to oppose the drilling - just as Arnhem Land Traditional Owners from Yirrkala did 50 years ago to oppose a mining development and start the land rights movement. To draw attention to their struggle they also performed traditional dances and songs outside Paltar's Sydney office last Friday.

Paltar has applied for about 30 permits to drill for oil and gas along the length of the

Northern Territory's Arnhem Land coast. Paltar also plans to use the controversial fracking technique to split the bedrock, risking groundwater sources the local communities need for fresh water.

"We don't trust mining companies," Traditional Owner Ben Marjarra Pascoe said. "Mining companies, they just kill the land, kill the trees, kill the animals and what do they leave?"

"They just leave behind their mess. White man makes mess; black man cleans up white man's mess. We're the ones who are going to suffer long term."

Arnhem Land Traditional Owners have a proud past in seeing off pastoralists and miners before the area was declared an Aboriginal reserve in 1931 and they don't plan on stopping now. That fierce independence has helped them keep their culture alive and vibrant.

"Arnhem Land is the last region of Australia's Top End to be targeted by the resources industry after Cape York and the Kimberley, which recently saw off Woodside's proposed gas factory," Wilderness Society Northern Australia Campaign Manager, Gavan McFadzean said.

Australian Marine Conservation Society Northern Marine campaigner, Daisy Barham said mining was a major threat to land and Culture. "The Top End has the healthiest shallow tropical seas anywhere in the world, yet oil, gas and mining are quickly becoming



Confronting the miners ... Arnhem Land Traditional Owners Eddie Mason, Rosita Ankin, Ross Brian and Elston Maxwell were joined below by many supporters to protest outside the Sydney headquarters of US oil and gas company Paltar. Image: Glenn Walker.

an enormous threat to this fragile place," she said.

The Traditional Owners only found out about the drilling after they were told about a small advertisement in the Northern Territory News in November. In December 250 people descended on the small town of Maningrida to voice their opposition to the drilling.

In the Northern Territory, Traditional

Owners can veto resource developments on their land but they do not have any control of the adjoining sea which coastal groups say is as important as the land because not only is it their food source but it is integral to their culture and spiritual beliefs.

The Traditional Owners opposition to Paltar's plans and request for a meeting was originally met with a letter from Paltar which the Traditional Owners saw only worthy of burning.

Eddie Mason, one five Traditional Owners who made the trip to Sydney, said Traditional Owners were worried any accidents would threaten their food source and existence. "All of these blackfellas all around Arnhem Land will be starving because that's their natural tucker, that's their food, that's their life. You're killing him, the black man," Mr Mason said.

Wildlife in the area include many threatened and rare species such as six of the seven sea turtle species in the world, dugongs, coastal dolphins, northern quolls, Oenpelli pythons, Gouldian finches and bandicoots. The diversity of freshwater fish is amongst the highest in Australia. It's home to some of the world's last major free flowing rivers including the Liverpool, Roper, Blyth and Goyder rivers.



Australian Government

Department of Health and Ageing

COMMONWEALTH HACC PROGRAM FUNDING ROUND

TO ENHANCE, EXPAND OR ESTABLISH NEW SERVICE DELIVERY

The Commonwealth Home and Community Care (HACC) Program provides funding for basic maintenance, care and support services for older people and their carers, who live in the community and whose capacity for independent living is at risk, or who are at risk of premature or inappropriate admission to long term residential care. Older people are people aged 65 years and over and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 50 years and over.

The Department of Health and Ageing is seeking applications from organisations to enhance, expand or establish new service delivery under the Commonwealth HACC Program. The grant application round is now open, with \$281.2 million available for provision of services from early 2014 until 30 June 2015.

Organisations interested in applying for funding must address the assessment criteria in the format outlined in the application form. Documentation providing further details on the application and assessment process, including funding priorities, is available for downloading after completing the Applicants Register on the Department of Health and Ageing website at <http://www.health.gov.au/tenders>.

All enquiries for information or clarification by potential applicants should be emailed to Commonwealth.HACC.Funding@health.gov.au.

Applications for funding must be received by the Department of Health and Ageing by 2.00pm on 2 September 2013.

ACT has "long way to go" to Close the Gap

A new report shows the ACT still has a way to go to close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage despite some marked improvements.

The ACT Closing the Gap Report 2013 gauges the success of ACT Government and community providers' efforts to address the needs of the Territory's 5,100 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents.

It shows that compared nationally, Canberra's Indigenous residents are more likely to own or be buying a home.

But between 2006 and 2011, the rate of over-crowding in their housing increased and the rate of homelessness for Indigenous people rose by 166 per cent.

That increase may be partly due to new outreach services and counting methods.

The report also points out in the decade to 2011, the ACT saw consistent improvement in Indigenous unemployment rates and educational outcomes.

The ACT Government employs 258 staff who identify as having Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.

That is about 1.2 per cent of its workforce and just shy of its target.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Minister, Shane Rattenbury said significant progress had been made in the last year.

"However, positive national comparisons cannot hide the fact that when compared to the rest of the ACT, we have a long way to go," he said.

"The Closing the Gap objectives are long term and require continual improvement, investment and commitment to achieve our goal. It is essential we identify the needs of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and that the services and programs available are best suited to those needs."

- Kathleen Dyett, ABC