



Media Release

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Native title agreement paves way

A native title agreement reached between the Gunditjmara people and the State of Victoria is set to be recognized by the Federal Court on Friday 30 March in a special sitting near Portland in south western Victoria.

The agreement recognizes that the Gunditjmara people hold native title over approximately 2000 parcels of Crown land in Victoria's far South West.

'The Gunditjmara people have fought for eleven years to be recognized by the Court in this way, and we congratulate them for their endurance and tenacity', said Native Title Services Victoria Chairman Graham Atkinson. 'Today we celebrate the fact that the Australian legal system has finally acknowledged the strength of the Gunditjmara people's connection to their country,' he said.

The native title claim, which was first lodged in 1996, covers only Crown land and waters (including national parks, state forests and reserves) and does not affect any privately owned land.

'More than 30 parties were involved in the negotiations, including the State and Commonwealth Governments', said Mr Atkinson. 'In accordance with native title law, the agreement specifically preserves all existing interests and ensures that they will not be adversely affected.'

'This demonstrates that native title is not something to fear; it is something to embrace as a way forward from past injustices,' said Mr Atkinson.

'The agreement shows what can be achieved when people sit down together and sort out the issues, rather than fighting in the courts,' he said. This is the second determination of native title in Victoria that has been reached through consent of all the parties.

'We encourage the Government to continue to work with traditional owners in this State to resolve outstanding and future native title claims,' Mr Atkinson said.

The Court hearing will take place at Mt Eccles National Park from 11am on Friday 30 March.

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Native Title Services Victoria is an independent company funded by the Commonwealth Government under the *Native Title Act 1993* to represent native title claim groups in Victoria. www.nts.com.au.