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MEDIA RELEASE

Native Title holders call for national peak body

More than 60 native titleholders have called for a national peak body for Prescribed Bodies Corporate to have a direct line of communication with Governments about land and sea matters at a meeting in Melbourne today.

Representing more than 50 Prescribed Bodies Corporate (PBCs), the meeting was held ahead of the 10th annual Native Title Conference at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, co-convened by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) and Native Title Services Victoria (NTSV).

“The PBCs need to talk directly with government – not just with the agencies. This government has said ‘sorry’ to the stolen generations and we don’t want to lose that emotional connection we have,” Vince Mundraby Mandingalbay Yidinji PBC (Qld) said.

“It’s been 17 years now since the Mabo decision and it’s time to recognise the rights of PBCs over our land and sea if we are to secure economic development for our people.”

“PBCs are the future of land management and decision making about country in Australia,” CEO of Lhere Artepe PBC (NT) Darryl Pearce said at the second national meeting of PBCs in Melbourne today.

“As the rightful owners of substantial amounts of land and water in Australia, recognised by the courts, PBCs are looking for a change in their relationship with governments and agencies and to be taken seriously.”

James Bon from Mer Gedkem Le PBC (Murray Island, Qld) said the meeting agreed that PBCs need to establish a national voice to coordinate information, to mentor new PBCs, lobby to influence policy and sit with other national bodies such as the Council of Australian Governments.

“Any new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representative structure should take into account native title holding groups,” Mary Lou Buck of the Dunghutti Elders Council PBC said.

The meeting also recognised the need to build the strength of PBC organisations and of their communities. The meeting examined the limited options for funding and resourcing native title processes once native title is determined and called for all levels of government to recognise the functions PBCs perform and the importance of their role.

At 19 January 2009 there were 82 determinations that native title exists, and 80 PBCs established, or in the process of being established.

Media contact: Chris Ryan on 0408 688 026. Photos are available on request of the PBC meeting.

