

Family groups whose native title claims failed now control lucrative Burrup royalty fund

\$18m fund in minority hands

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EXCLUSIVE**

About 50 Pilbara Aboriginals in three small, family-based groups, whose native title claims all failed, have wrested control of an \$18 million-plus State Government royalty fund struck to allow more industry on the rock art-rich Burrup Peninsula.

The groups have overpowered the interests of about 900 people in the Roebourne-based Yindjibarndi and Ngarluma communities, whose native title claims succeeded.

An inquiry by *The West Australian* has found that the Government allowed the small family groups to take eight out of 12 places on the Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation's governing committee, set up last year to administer money flowing from a 2003 agreement that cleared the way for expanded industry on the Burrup.

An up-front payment of \$4 million was made by Alan Carpenter to the Murujuga Corporation last year. Since then, it has received \$1,138,200 from the sale of blocks in Landcorp's Tambrey Estate in Karratha.

The Premier said then that the corporation, which now gets 5 per cent of all new land sales in Karratha, would represent "all the indigenous interests" in the area. "I congratulate the Ngarluma-Yindjibarndi, Yaburara-Mardudhunera and Wong-goo-tt-oo

people for putting in place the appropriate structures that have now allowed the benefits to flow to the community," he said.

But the structure and secretiveness of the corporation has caused simmering discontent among the rival groups, which all lodged overlapping native title claims. Yindjibarndi and Ngarluma leaders this week said they had been unable to get information about Murujuga's income or how it was spending the money.

None of the five groups was successful in claims over the Burrup Peninsula because the Federal Court found that all native title there had been extinguished. But before that determination, the Gallop government signed the Burrup and Maitland Industrial Estates agreement with the Aboriginals after saying it would compulsorily acquire their native title rights in the affected areas.

The Government's Office of Native Title head Gary Hamley says the corporation was properly set up by a series of community meetings involving all the groups.

"I think those meetings were misinformed," the operations manager of the Yindjibarndi's Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation, Michael Woodley said yesterday. "Of course the Government have washed their hands of it. They don't have any interest in seeing that everyone knows about it and shares in it."

Mr Woodley said the members of the corporation were the same people Woodside was paying \$500 a day to give heritage site clearances for rock art on the Burrup Peninsula.

Ngarluma Aboriginal Corporation chairwoman Jill Churnside said a small group of people was doing well, while most of the community lived in poverty. Her group had got nothing from the BMIEA agreement.

Murujuga chairman Peter Hicks declined to talk to *The West Australian*. First he claimed it was on legal advice, but yesterday said he needed his committee's permission.

Yesterday, the corporation's solicitor offered to put questions before the corporation to see if it would consent to answer, and said allegations of wrongdoing would be denied.

The corporation received \$100,000 from the Government last year for administration costs and \$75,000 of "education funding for student support and cultural matters". No financial records have been filed with the Registrar of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporations.

Asked if he was satisfied that Murujuga adequately represented the interests of the Aboriginal communities, Deputy Premier Eric Ripper said it had been set up by an independent consultant employed by the Government.



Bush gallery: Rock art near King Bay on the Burrup Peninsula. Picture: Nic Ellis