

Garma 2012

Resources Nitty-Gritty

2/09/2012

The second day of Garma 2012 continued on with nitty-gritty discussions of the resources boom and its opportunities and challenges for Aboriginal Australia.

Even with the mini-format this year, and the major refurbishment of the site, there was still a touch of the spirit of the larger Garma festival. GARMA 2012 attendees witnessed a very moving ceremony on the steps of Buku Larrngay Mulka to honour a much loved senior painter, the recently departed sister of Galarrwuy Yunupingu.



Buku Larrngay Mulka Ceremony to Honour a Sister and Revered Senior Painter

The ceremony was a reminder of the ongoing strength, resilience and majesty of the Yolngu people. It also allowed visitors to visit the world renowned art gallery. Viewing the famous Church panels, and seeing the new bark paintings, burial poles, sculptures and works on glass is worth a trip to Yirrkala/Nhulunbuy/Gove in its own right. Interestingly, just as the Garma site is being refurbished, so important renovations at BLM are underway – not that you would notice.

A visit to the Buku Larrngay Mulka gallery is a major highlight for Garma attendees. This year was no exception. In addition to the moving ceremony, the new Yolngu band *East Journey* gave

a wonderful performance in the BLM auditorium. The band will probably be touring south over the next year, so look out for them.



Marcia Langton, Mel Stutsel, Warren Mundine

Day 1 ended with a long and memorable discussion led by Minerals Council CEO Mitch Hooke. It set up many complex discussions that went on long into the night. Then followed on Day 2 some thought provoking presentations from Bob Gordon, Managing Director, Forestry Tasmania, Michael O'Connor from the CFMEU, Warren Mundine from One Generation and Melanie Stutsel from the Minerals Council of Australia.

The general focus was on how far agreement making had come over the past decade. In particular it was noted that in the best cases even where there are now no formal land rights acknowledged, increasingly mining companies will negotiate with Aboriginal custodians and owners regardless. Warren focused on the challenges ahead for transforming the 57000 pledges to create Aboriginal jobs into real, ongoing positions.



NT local hero 2011, Djapirri Munnungirritj spoke passionately about grass roots community issues

One of the highlights of the day was a presentation by Njamal women of the agreement reached between FMG and the Njamal people of the Pilbara. Following on their successful development of Ngarda Civil and Mining the Njamal people engineered an agreement in which they are to become full commercial partners with FMG in the extraction and mining of iron ore. They also have joint control with FMG of all the contracts for all of the ancillary services and operations associated with mining. The Njamal agreement involves four dimensions: rent and royalties, a commercial joint venture, administration of contracts, a strategic planning process involving partnerships and community development.

Joanne Pafumi of Xstrata also made a presentation about how much progress they had made at the McArthur River region. Again it was a significant presentation that demonstrated how far the company had come in recognising and working with its Indigenous community.



Geo-Thermal Project Heads of Agreement between Geodynamics and Gumatj Corporation

The second day saw the signing of a heads of agreement between Geodynamics and the Gumatj Corporation to investigate whether it will be possible to provide energy through geothermal high heat hot water to the bauxite refinery owned by Pacific Aluminium. This represents a critical dimension for the ongoing success of the Pacific Aluminium plant with its high energy needs. This will involve an allotment of shares to Gulkula Mining Corporation which is owned by Gumatj corporation.



Chief Operating Officer, Duncan Hedditch of Pacific Aluminium. Djawa Yunupingu and Gumatj Corporation representatives

Another highlight of this year's discussions was the address by Minister Alfredo Pires, Minister for Petroleum Resources, Timor Leste. Last year then President of East Timor, Jose Ramos Horta, signed a memorandum of understanding with the Gumatj Corporation.

This was a very far-sighted agreement for Yolngu people because this year Timor Leste are leading the G7 plus group of so-called fragile nations which is getting increasing international attention. There is much benefit for the Yolngu people from hearing about national level policies and agreements to develop natural resources. G7plus is now starting to focus on resource development and to develop a best practice path to economic development. Most of the G7plus nations are resource owners.

One of the policies outlined by Minister Pires was Timor Leste's oil for human development strategy. In short, the policy pursues maximum human participation, maximum benefits and maximum diversification of industry for the East Timorese.



Djawa Yunuingu, Januario Carvalho, Chief of Staff to Minister Alfredo Perez & Balupalu Yunupingu. Timor Leste and Gumatj Representatives Exchange Gifts

The Timorese government has set up a regulatory body, a company and a research organization to exploit oil and gas.

Mr. Pires noted “There is no Mother Teresa in resources development. It is a hard game.”. In East Timor Mr. Pires argued there was no choice but to develop the needed infrastructure, expertise and capacity from scratch. A nationwide test became the basis for selection for students to enrol in engineering and sciences. Mr Pires is leading a national effort to create engineers and geologists that can assist in the development of natural resources and this involves training and education across the globe.

The Timor Leste people have developed a 20 year petroleum development plan and are determined to create a pipeline from the Sunrise oil field to the mainland of Timor Leste where the petroleum will be refined. This involves building a port and a series of developments on Timor Leste’ south coast.

Amongst many of the initiatives discussed by Mr. Pires, Timor is training sixteen oil and gas helicopter pilots including two girls to fly the helicopters between the Sunrise field and the coast.

The helicopter training is being completed in Australia and there is also an English immersion course for the helicopter trainees running out of India.

Mr Pires noted that resources development can be a long, inter-generational process. This is why great responsibility is being placed on to the shoulders of young Timorese geo-technicians, engineers and finance people. Mr Pires affectionately calls his department heads and up and coming technocrats - ‘the young guns’.

An important initiative that is most important for Australian Aboriginal treaty and contract makers is what Mr Pires transparency in governance. He explained that the path of resource development is very difficult so it was important to be open and transparent so that if there was a better way to do something it would become apparent. It was also important to be accountable for the large sums of money involved in resources deals. In East Timor all of the funds and payments have to be reported publicly. The petroleum fund earns about \$ 2.5 billion a year. Each year all the figures are published. The Timorese Transparency model involves a transparency portal in which the resources budget and all government decisions in relation to procurement and contracts are published on the internet as soon as the decisions are taken..

The Resources Minister for Timor Leste promised that he would be back next year with a delegation of “his young guns” from his department.

The theme of the Garma key forum was *Australia's Resources Boom: Stepping Stone to an Indigenous Future*. The conclusion of the Garma forum was that resources certainly could be a stepping stone. It was observed that the mining industry had come a long way. Leaders observed that Aboriginal Australia was fast making a transition from a welfare dependent community to a sophisticated business community. However there was a lot of work to be done. Some ideas that emerged included

- more transparency and sharing of agreements and experiences across the country,
- the Njamal community were praised for the cutting edge agreement with FMG. The Njamal concept of owning and operating a mine, subcontracting for many ancillary services associated with the resources boom and making wise investments was seen as a harbinger of the future.
- the concept of benefit sharing needed to replace the focus on financial payments per se which was too often pushed by lawyers. If it was just about financial payments then resources could be a curse. The new focus was on wise investment that formed a permanent accumulation for future generations.
- It was also observed that there should be a process where Indigenous people could spell out a detailed vision of the future.
- There was a feeling that the elders and cultural leaders should be leading discussions.

2012 Garma was a success. It should be noted that because of the infrastructure and building there was some question about whether even a mini-Garma could be held. In this context the organizers and hosts pulled off a highly successful cultural and intellectual exchange of ideas around the resources industry. They were also able to showcase some of the new facilities and dimensions of the Garma campus and Institute. In 2013, with the bungul ground and main stage refurbished, it will be back to the full Garma festival, with a few changes, but with greatly improved amenities and facilities.

Audio of the speeches and discussion from Garma 2012 will be available on-line later in the week.