

Dr Kathleen Dermody
Committee Secretary
Senate Economics References Committee
PO Box 6100
CANBERRA ACT 2600

8 February 2016

SENATE INQUIRY INTO BAUXITE RESOURCE NEAR AURUKUN IN CAPE YORK

Dear Committee members,

Thank you for receiving this submission.

I would like to introduce myself. My name is Jonathan Korkaktain, and I am the Chair of Ngan Aak-Kunch Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC which acts as the agent and representative for the Wik, Wik Waya and Kugu People of west Cape York, and in particular for those Traditional Owners in Aurukun township. My family comes from the land down South Kendall River way. I am of the Apalech clan and speak the local tongues of Wik Mungkan (the common language) and Wik Ngatharr (my family's language).

Before the Queensland Government even opened the Competitive Bid Process in 2012, the Aurukun community members, including our Elders and Traditional Owners, approached Mr Benson to see if it was possible to form a company together so that we could share in the ownership and management of the mine on our land. This ensured that our culture, land and waters were protected, and that we could maximise jobs for our people.

Together with other Wik Elders, I have sadly watched on from the sideline while many big mining companies have come and gone to Aurukun over the past 50 years. I am told that many millions of dollars have been spent by these companies on studies and surveys, but I don't see any benefits for my community. There has been no real training, no real long-term jobs in Aurukun, and the young people sit with nothing to do. All of the problems facing my community, and my People, can be traced to the fact that we have no jobs and no hope for the future. My heart is sad when I see so many children and grandchildren with no hope to be like children and grandchildren in other parts of Australia. I want them to have better opportunities in the future. The Government continues to start and stop welfare projects, and we really do appreciate all that they do and their help – but we don't want to continue to be dependent on welfare. That's proven to be no good for any of us.

The Board I sit on, the NAK Board, feels a very heavy responsibility to listen to all Wik Traditional Owners – from all the clans and families we represent – to do our very best to assist them with their desires and wishes in respect to mining on their land. If this mine is to go ahead on RA315, the Board wants to make sure that benefits are shared transparently to all Wik and Wik Waya families. We also want our voices to be heard, so that our land and waters are not destroyed and after the mining of the land that it is not left for dead. We want to build a future for the next generation - in a sustainable way. We also want to work closely with the Aurukun Shire Council, but unfortunately our last request for a meeting (16 June 2015) was rejected by the Aurukun Shire Council's CEO

Bernie McCarthy on the basis that they would wait for instructions from the Government's champion Mr David Edwards.

Five years ago when Chalco packed up and left, we decided that we did not want history repeated. It was time for us to be central in the economic developments on our land, and not sit idly by waiting for royalty handouts.

We have appreciated the help that Cape York Land Council, Balkanu and Mr Benson provided to help us since those early days. We had many open discussions, and the community supported the idea in putting our own joint proposal into Government. We were very confused by Government telling us that if we were to have any ownership in this new mine, then we would not be able to have any voice in the decisions of Government. When there was a change of Government and Minister Seeney came to speak with us in community, we believed that he was truly supporting our efforts and would grant us sufficient time to prepare our offer.

However, the last two years has not been a happy period, for NAK or the Aurukun people. It looks like Minister Seeney and his Government was making up new rules as they went along. But all the changes were not to support us – just the opposite. One road block put up after another... and history was repeated again with another big global company taking hold of our lease with no consultation with those directly affected – us.

In our culture we like open discussions – face-to-face, but when Government introduced hard probity rules it made it more difficult for us especially in talking with Mr Benson.

At the end of the day, we were surprised that the whole process was simply closed without any consultation or notification to NAK. With all the work that NAK and community members had done, it is clear that the Government was not interested in our voice. If you study all of the Government media, it states over and over again that the most important outcome from mining on RA315 was to show benefits to Indigenous Land Owners and community of Aurukun. Who should be the judge as to what these benefits ought to be?

We spent weeks and weeks talking to Traditional Owners and community members and we believe that the benefits contained in our registered ILUA with Aurukun Bauxite Development (ABD), headed by Mr Benson, are what we want. I am sure that these benefits are the best ever negotiated by a remote indigenous community, like ours, ever in Queensland.

In my culture, I only speak for myself, but I believe that the major benefit for the Wik People is to have our voices listened to for the whole life of the mine operation. Our ILUA with ABD secured 2 positions on the board of the company, to ensure that this mine will always be in the hands of Wik Traditional Owners. Our people will then be able to learn how a big company operates and we will be able to see everything. This is how business should be done – transparently. Will a big multinational company do this? I sadly don't think so! We will have a local works office in Aurukun, and the head office will be in Cairns – not overseas. If we have any problems, we can talk at Board level without delay.

The second major benefit of our NAK / ABD offer is the strong focus on training and jobs for local people. Many of the big companies talk about doing this but there is not much success. Mr Benson has brought into our company people like Jim Lewis from Dadaru and Dan Tenardi from Ngarda.

These people have proven that with early training and mentoring, it is possible to achieve a majority local indigenous employed goal. This is the way forward for our community – jobs.

With our 15% ownership of the mine, there is an obvious potential for substantial financial gain but just as important is the sense of pride it will bring. It will restore a sense of dignity to our Elders, and that will help unite and build back up our struggling community.

From the media, it seems like the Government wants to dismiss this good news story by suggesting that ABD may not succeed and then nobody gets any benefits. Well, we have confidence in Mr Nick Stump who was the boss of Mount Isa Mines and Comalco, which is now our neighbour RioTinto. We also have confidence in the rest of the management team of ABD, and the support offered by Thiess, to help us run the operation in a professional manner that equally respects our country.

We understand that many mining ventures and mining companies in Australia do not succeed, especially in this current economic climate. Even the big companies like BHP, RioTinto and Glencore are selling and closing mines everyday – so why does the Government not hear our voice, and give us this once in a lifetime chance? ABD is not asking for one cent from the Government or tax payers in Australia. If we try our best, but still fail – then the Government can take back the lease just as they did with Pechiney and Chalco. I feel a great deal of sadness that we are not given this chance and I will fight just as hard as Elders before me that fought for Wik Land Rights.

Even though the Government has signed an Agreement with Glencore, we have still not seen any real benefits package from them. Glencore does not come and talk to the Board of NAK. The only document we have received from Glencore indicated that they require a number of additional years of study and they are looking at a mine life of only 20 years (page 4 of their brochure). ABD is ready to start now, and time is very important to us. Look at the trouble our Aurukun community experienced over Christmas. Dozens of our young people were taken to Cairns and charged with civil disobedience. For us, in Aurukun, the “Gap” seems to be getting bigger – not smaller. This is a turning point in the history of Aurukun and the Wik People.

We need help, but we don’t need more handouts. We don’t want history repeated, we simply ask for natural justice, a moral outcome to this situation, and a chance for real jobs for our community – not just receivers of welfare. This is important to the community, and it is an important way to ensure the protection of our culture and future.

Thank you for taking the time to receive my submission.

I remain available to appear before the Inquiry.

Jonathan Korkaktain

Chairman

Ngan Aak-Kunch Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC (ICN 4097)

Registered Native Title Body Corporate and Land Owner for the Wik & Wik Waya People

m:

c/o: