



Mpwerempwer takes water licence fight to High Court

The native title holders and other traditional owners threatened by the massive Singleton Station water licence have asked the Central Land Council to take their fight for their water rights to Australia's highest court.

The Mpwerempwer [pronounced emPUrra-empurra] Aboriginal Corporation is asking the High Court to hear an appeal after its members, the native title holders for Singleton Station, told CLC chief executive Les Turner they want to start legal action in the High Court.

The CLC will represent Mpwerempwer in its case.

The 40 gigalitre licence is the largest amount of water the Territory has ever given away free of charge – groundwater the desert region's native plants, animals and sacred water sites depend on.

"I am worried about this station," elder Ned Kelly told him at a meeting in Tennant Creek in late May.

"This Mpwerempwer is a powerful place. It covers all this area. It is a powerful story there."

He is counting on the CLC to help the traditional owners to continue their long fight against the licence.

"CLC that's the only way we can get it, they are fighting for us. We have to keep on fighting."

"The traditional owners have said many times that they will never stop fighting against the licence that threatens their sacred sites and their communities' water security," Mr Turner said.

"The appeal is one of the avenues open to them."

The native title holders also decided to take part in an assessment of the environmental impact of Fortune Agribusiness' plans to grow fruit and vegetables in the desert, for overseas markets.

The Northern Territory Environmental Protection Agency will assess whether the company's plans to protect dozens of sacred sites, hunting and gathering grounds and other important stories and places on Singleton are adequate.

In the meantime, the company is not allowed to use the groundwater under the licence.

The native title holders hope to demonstrate to the agency that the licence will damage too many sacred sites and environmental values, and recommend to deny the company the environmental approvals.

Mr Turner said the native title holders believe the stakes are simply too high to leave any stone unturned.

"They told me that if the licence goes ahead, their precious groundwater-dependent sites will disappear, leaving them with nowhere to teach their young people and carry on their ceremonies," he said.

Mpwerempwer's decision not to give up comes after the NT Court of Appeal dismissed its appeal against the licence in May.

More than five years after the traditional owners first spoke up against the Singleton water licence, their battle continues.

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