

Speech by Mr Parry Agius, Executive Officer,  
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*Indigenous Employment in SA: Resources Industry Forum*  
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Good morning. I'm Parry Agius and I head up the Native Title Unit.

In the short time I have today I want to do three things:

Firstly: I want to tell you how the Aboriginal people feel about ILUAs. I want to explain how ILUAs benefit all parties and I want to argue that we should just get on and conclude the 73 outstanding ILUAs in SA – especially those in the resource sector – without anymore mucking around.

Secondly : I want to table a plan, a map, which shows all the stakeholders – Aboriginal people, the resources sector, Government and South Australia as a whole - where we need to go.

And thirdly: finally I want to throw some ideas on the table, some directions so we can actually use the map and can get to where we all want to be – quickly, efficiently and at the minimum cost possible.

ILUAs are effective and productive agreements secured between the NTU (as a part of ALRM) on behalf of Aboriginal people and the various business and industry sectors that have legitimate interests in the country.

The various negotiating parties gather around what we call the “Maintable” and they include organisations like SACOME, SAFF, SAFIC, LGA. The SA Government’s Native Title Negotiating Unit and various State and Commonwealth Government departments help with facilitation and resources.

How do Aboriginal people view ILUAs? It’s a good question.

Let me put it this way.

If an oil hungry world found a major oil supply under your block or your farm – and it was only accessible only via your land - my bet is you wouldn’t want to just sit on it and say “don’t touch it”.

My bet is:

- ❑ you’d want a say as how and where the drilling took place,
- ❑ you’d want some compensation for loss,
- ❑ you’d want a fair and equitable share of the profits when they started to flow
- ❑ and if your family and other members of your community didn’t have jobs, you’d want to have a look at the employment and training opportunities on offer as well.

So, Aboriginal people see ILUAS as a way of building Partnerships for the Future – with two broad sets of objectives:

- ❑ **One** is to provide opportunities for Aboriginal people in South Australia with employment, education, training and business opportunities over the next 15 years.
- ❑ **Two** is offer to business and industry
  - certainty
  - access
  - the support rather than the opposition of local communities
  - ready access to trained and skilled Aboriginal labour – people who locals, who know the country and the conditions and have as much pride and reason to help you develop resources.

If we look at South Australia's Strategic Plan, the State Government says it is committed to better outcomes for Aboriginal people.

Targets 6.1 and 6.2 of the State Government's Strategic Plan aim to improve the well-being of Aboriginal communities by reducing the gaping discrepancies between the State's Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in such critical areas as health, life expectancy, employment, education, and school retention.

ILUAs are also good for resource companies.

ILUAs are agreed to by tribal elders and therefore, under Aboriginal custom and law, are universally accepted and supported by the Aboriginal people concerned. No legal mechanisms dreamed up by lawyers over lunch on Gouger Street that can achieve that.

So, in one fell swoop, ILUAs bypass long, expensive and convoluted negotiations involving clusters of lawyers, all with the clock running.

ILUAs send strong, positive signals to industry, government and the market. These positive messages help to demonstrate to shareholders and stakeholders that you have.

- ❑ a stable environment;
- ❑ secure access to the resource,
- ❑ supportive local communities,
- ❑ and quicker time to market and earlier ROI.

Local one-on-one agreements may seem appealing but, more often than not, they end up being divisive and counter-productive.

ILUAs add great value and the certainty provides a strong rationale for the provision, by Government, of local infrastructure like roads, utilities and community amenities.

This fast-tracking of services, infrastructure and training helps prepare local labour. The economic benefits of having a skilled labour force that lives locally, is familiar with the country and comfortable in the conditions, are obvious.

With an ILUA in place you gain instant access to claims and you are living and working with a cooperative, helpful local community. This means you get to market faster and cheaper.

ILUAs are just as good for Aboriginal communities.

ILUAs confirm and define the support of Aboriginal people for the resource development and in doing so they help deliver:

- ❑ Education and training
- ❑ Jobs
- ❑ Business opportunities
- ❑ Community development
- ❑ Infrastructure

The truth is that Aboriginal people are just as keen as you to see resources developed on their land. But, not unreasonably, they expect to be recognised, respected and given fair value and equity in return. It's fair and it's not brain surgery.

Aboriginal people in SA see resource development as a real and practical way for them to get education, training and jobs to become economically self-sufficient.

ILUAs are win-win.

ILUAs open the way for resource development and are good for all South Australians.

The sooner that developments can begin, the earlier royalties etc begin to flow and help underwrite much-needed services.

The sooner development projects start, the sooner Aboriginal people can start earning a living and the sooner their communities will stop having to rely on the public purse.

The sooner resources open up, the sooner we can start to deliver to Aboriginal people and communities the sorts of services that the rest of South Australia takes for granted.

The sooner investment is made and projects get going, the sooner Aboriginal kids stop going to bed sick, hungry and uneducated.

The sooner we can train our people to get and hold jobs, the sooner we can start to enjoy the fruits of this resources boom we are told so much about but haven't seem much of yet.

The macro-economic impact of the resource industry employing Aboriginal people on the well-being of Aboriginal people is, potentially, profoundly positive.

I earlier called for an acceleration of the ILUA negotiation process.

No-one at the Maintable will deny that ILUAs are one of the keys for kick-starting development but the reality is that between 1999 and 2006 we have:

- concluded and registered 4 ILUAs
- concluded - but not registered - 3 ILUAs
- 4 ILUAs currently under discussion

By 2010 we have set a target to register another 23 ILUAs. At the present rate, even if we count the unregistered ones, we will only secure 4 more ILUAs by 2010. This is not the result that any of the stakeholders need – and certainly not what SA needs.

So Aboriginal people call for a redoubled effort - and redoubled funding so we can finalise these outstanding negotiations as quickly as possible.

In particular we wish to acknowledge the SA Government's hardworking, dedicated ILUA Negotiating Unit. The Unit's members do outstanding work.

In my opening remarks I said wanted to table a map that shows all the stakeholders – Aboriginal people, the resources sector, Government and South Australia as a whole - where we need to go.

To preface this, let's look at a snapshot of some of the major resource projects currently underway - or planned - for South Australia.

You'll see that nearly all are in regional or remote locations, and all are on traditional Aboriginal lands. Clearly, with all these operations underway, they will strongly propel the State's growth and wealth.

All of these projects will require significant labour resources to succeed.

So I ask you, what's better? A trained labour force that lives in the neighbourhood or a labour force that has to be enticed out there on a fly-in/fly-out basis?

Existence in harsh environments? This is our country. We live here and we love it.

Heat? We do heat.

Freezing desert nights? We do freezing desert nights.

Flies? We cope with flies.

Shimmering horizons and space as far as the eye can see? We love it

The Land. It's our everything. We respect it

So I ask you again, how good is a labour resource that can be sourced locally, is trained and skilled, reliable, enthusiastic and highly capable?

Our plan calls for a total of 3000 Aboriginal people to be trained and to find employment in the resource industry in SA over the next 15 years. That's an average of 200 per year... men and women – as mechanics, drivers, machine-operators, professionals, trades-people, nurses, environmental officers, ... etc.

This is not a pipe dream. It is achievable and mirrors what is happening in other places such as Western Australia. The map is, in fact, based on already existing, excellent agreements and programs run by leading mining companies (such as RioTinto and Newmont) and the Aboriginal communities among which they work.

We know it's do-able because it's been done.

If we can secure full-time employment for this many Aboriginal people, governments, in their facilitation roles, will be able to invest confidently in the sorts of infrastructure and services to make sure Aboriginal people are ready for - and supported in – employment.

In this short time we have together today, I'm not able to detail all the macro-economic and social benefits of achieving this plan. But you don't have to be Paul Davies to work them out.

Our commitment is this: the ALRM's Native Title Unit will promote this plan and work closely with the resource sector and the government to see it come true. We can only imagine the impact of employing 3000 Aboriginal people in the resource sector. Many South Australian Aboriginal communities would find themselves well on the way to economic self- sufficiency and genuine self-determination. The advantages to the Resource Industry are immense, and the employment of 3000 Aboriginal people drops the States unemployment rate, and relieves the public purse

You've heard our commitment. The question now is "Will you work with us to see it achieved?"

In summary....

By 2020 we aim and expect that there will be 3,000 Aboriginal people employed in the resources industry. We can do it and we should do it.

I refuse to listen to people who will say that it's impossible.

If we, as a nation, can develop a drug that has saved hundreds of millions of lives,  
if we can build the Snowy Mountains Scheme,  
if we can build a bridge over Sydney Harbour and tunnel underneath it  
then we can train and employ 200 Aboriginal South Australians in the resource sector  
each year for 15 years. Easy.

How do get there? With a plan, destination and a series of things we know we have to do to get there. And we take the journey one step at a time.

- ❑ We establish a process to develop partnerships between Maintable parties, the resource sector and government.
- ❑ The resource sector identifies its labour force requirements, along with the skills, qualifications and training levels required
- ❑ Indigenous communities identify their potential applicants.
- ❑ Government identifies and puts in place the infrastructure requirements for Aboriginal communities so that individuals can be job-ready.
- ❑ Service delivery agencies identify and put in place specific programs for individuals and for communities to get them job-ready
- ❑ The resources industry provides industry-specific training and provides on-the-job experience for applicants.

Thank you and good morning ....