

Elders explore options for GoGo

Rourke Walsh



Gooniyandi Aboriginal Corporation chairwoman Lynette Shaw, Miriuwung elder Ted Carlton, Gooniyandi elder Mervyn Street, Kimberley Agricultural Investment general manager Jim Engelke, Miriuwung elder Button Jones, Gooniyandi elder Thomas Dick and Peter Taylor from GoGo Station out at Ord Stage 2.

Indigenous elders from WA's far north have toured agricultural developments near Kununurra as they look to negotiate a native title settlement for a broad-scale irrigation project on their traditional land near Fitzroy Crossing.

The lessees of GoGo Station, a 700,000ha property about 80km from Fitzroy, plan to develop a 15,000ha irrigated agriculture scheme on the property using wet season rain and water captured from the Fitzroy River.

But before work can start on the project, the developers must finalise a native title agreement with traditional owners of GoGo, the Gooniyandi people.

Last week, a group of Gooniyandi elders and station representatives were shown around Ord Stage 2 by developer Kimberley Agricultural Investment.

KAI has previously settled a native title agreement of its own with East Kimberley traditional owners the Miriuwung and Gajerrong people.

Gooniyandi Aboriginal Corporation chairwoman Lynette Shaw said elders had been impressed by the package the Miriuwung and Gajerrong people had secured; particularly the jobs and training for their young people.

"This is something that we're looking at for the future so we wanted to come and get the facts," she said.

"The training, education and jobs that are out here have really opened my mind."

Ms Shaw said the Gooniyandi board would discuss what they had seen before the findings were presented to the wider community.

"We want to hear the voice of the members and we want to invite MG (Miriuwung and Gajerrong) Corporation down (to Fitzroy) so that our people can hear from the horse's mouth themselves about how it's all working," she said.

Elder Thomas Dick said the project could be an important path to long-term jobs for his people. Elder Mervyn Street said the project would give them opportunity.

"What I see here are good things and a really good opportunity for young fellas with jobs operating machines," Mr Street said.

GoGo Station development manager Philip Hams said traditional owners seeing a similar agricultural development, like Ord Stage 2, was an important step.

"We've got some farming in the Fitzroy but nothing of this scale and we just wanted to show the Gooniyandi people what it looks like," he said.

"There is some serious opportunity for irrigation development at GoGo Station and the traditional owners are excited about what they see here."

Department of Regional Development director of major projects Peter Stubbs said the lessees of GoGo were experienced farmers and had a vision to produce more food in Northern Australia.

He said, unlike Ord Stage 2, the State Government was not contributing any money to the development.