

## Aurora Project Article for Publication

The aim of the Aurora Project is to promote the professional development of those who seek career opportunities within the field of Native Title. This developmental goal is achieved through the various schemes offered by the Aurora Project across many disciplines. These include law, anthropology, research, education and many others (see <http://www.auroraproject.com.au> for more details).

Despite having studied for law for 3 years, I was unfamiliar with many of the aspects that involve and affect Indigenous Australians, including property rights issues, encompassed by the concept of Native Title. I saw the Aurora Project Internship as a fantastic opportunity to develop my professional skills in this area by working in and with a Native Title Representative Body (**NTRB**); an organisation recognised by the Federal Government as having rights and responsibilities to assist Indigenous Australians. Equally, I saw it as an opportunity for personal development and to make a contribution to the community by generating a greater awareness of Native Title issues, how they affect Indigenous Australians daily and the challenges faced by the NTRB and similar bodies in attempts to address the wrongs of the past by working to protect property rights for the future.

I had never been to Western Australia before, let alone the Kimberley or Broome, and I was very unsure about to what to expect from my internship which involved a placement at the Kimberley Land Council (**KLC**). Key information about the areas that make up the Kimberley's and the various Aboriginal claim groups located within those areas was explained to me during my introduction to the KLC. The importance of three principles which inform the approach of the KLC staff; '*Getting Back Country*', '*Looking After Country*' and '*Getting Control of our Future*', was also impressed on me during my introduction. It was great to have this basic background knowledge to shape my learning and allow me to understand the approach of the KLC to their work.

The variety of work I was given at the KLC allowed me to become involved in as many different aspects of Native Title as possible which in turn enabled me to maximise my professional and personal development. The work included:

- assisting the drafting of affidavits from Traditional Owners establishing connection to the land;
- working across native title claims;
- assisting on various research tasks ranging from minor legislative details to preparing an on-going research project;
- attending meetings on-country with other KLC staff members including lawyers, anthropologists and native title officers;
- travelling to and around various remote communities throughout the Kimberley's; and
- various general administrative tasks.

The diversity of work allowed to me to appreciate first-hand some of the challenges encountered by the KLC in achieving their objectives which are focused around seeking the best possible outcome for the Traditional Owners. The flexible and sometimes impromptu approach of some of the Traditional Owners was very different to the structured and organised work practices utilised in the corporate workplace. However, this fresh approach challenged me to develop a personal approach that was adaptable to the client's needs, in this case requiring much more flexibility. I believe that such challenges and the resulting skills are pivotal to personal and professional development.

The Aurora Project Internship offered many amazing experiences and evidenced the real commitment in the community toward promoting, protecting and enforcing Aboriginal culture and heritage. A highlight that I am perhaps most grateful for was the opportunity to apply the law in a practical, grass-roots way such that the work had an observable, positive effect on the people the KLC seeks to assist. The lasting skills, knowledge and expanded awareness gained throughout the internship will assist me in my future endeavours irrespective of whether those endeavours are in Native Title or another area of law.

Despite having seen photographs of the outback, my travels on-country demonstrated that the Kimberley is an incredibly beautiful piece of Australian landscape that cannot be captured adequately in an image. In stark contrast to my city upbringing, I saw first-hand the raw, natural beauty of Australia's countryside and was imbued with an overwhelming sense that our country is meant to be shared for the benefit and enjoyment of all Australians. If the distinct sense this experience has left me with could be impressed on the wider Australian population, it would be a significant step toward finding a greater understanding of the relationship between Native Title rights and modern property rights.