



## FROM THE COAST

### Esperance Tjaltjraak Native Title Aboriginal Corporation Launched

Last week Shire representatives, State Government officials and other dignitaries attended the inaugural launch of Esperance Tjaltjraak Native Title Aboriginal Corporation (ETNTAC) and the opening of their new offices on Andrew St. Among those in attendance were Attorney General Michael Mischin and Minister for Regional Development and Lands, Terry Redman who had also attended the March 2014 federal determination function at the Civic Centre.

The function was a significant celebration acknowledging the 18 year process of obtaining land rights in Esperance. The dedicated and determined group of traditional owners fought long and hard to have their native title recognised by the Federal Court of Australia. During that time, some family members had passed away, never believing it would happen. But it did and the landmark occasion identified the first official recognition of Right to Country in the Goldfields and Esperance Region for Aboriginal people. 150 people travelled from across the state to attend the function.

Esperance Tjaltjraak Native Title Aboriginal Corporation acts as an agent for the Esperance Nyungar people's native title rights and interests. Tjaltjraak is a Nyungar term for a culturally significant eucalypt which roughly aligns with the boundaries of Esperance Nyungar country in its distribution.

Some of the projects ETNTAC have worked on include finding and protecting the resting place of Tommy Windich, an Aboriginal tracker who contributed to the wealth and development of the state by guiding surveyors across our vast land and who 140 years ago was laid to rest on a beach track in Esperance. His gravesite was disturbed over the years and the locations of his remains were not certain, leading ETNTAC to be involved to protect Tommy's burial site. They have also worked for input into government bushfire management and protection, lobbying for a return to traditional burns.

The group work alongside archaeologists, surveyors, historians, government authorities and organisations to voice concerns and ensure respect and cultural consideration is given to burial grounds and sacred places. By improving communications, the group are able to guide the way construction activities are undertaken in culturally and historically sensitive areas.

Local Government's role is to take into consideration the needs and wants of the whole community. Awareness of Aboriginal cultural practices and places of meaning are crucial in an area we know was occupied and managed long before European settlement. Cultural respect is demonstrated in awareness of Aboriginal places and objects, which remain significant in the lives of descendants and contribute to whole of community understanding of Esperance and its history. Reconciliation not only builds better relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the wider community, but also helps maintain mutual respect and understanding. By recognising the Nyungar people as the traditional owners of the land we are able to work together for the benefit of everyone.