



**Australian Government**  
**Indigenous Business Australia**

## Native Title Conference 2007

### Tides of Native Title

Cairns

6-8 June 2007

Cairns Convention Centre Outdoor Plaza

Breakout Session

1.30-3.00

Thursday 7 June

Future Acts and Commercial development

**Embracing economic development to achieve economic  
independence**

**By**

**Joseph Elu  
Chairman - IBA**



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## **Embracing economic development to achieve economic independence**

**Joseph Elu**  
**Chairman IBA**

Good Afternoon distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen; it is with great honour that I am back here on the ancestral lands of the Gimuy Walubara Yidini people.

I would also like to thank the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies for organising this conference and providing an opportunity for all of us to come together to talk about our futures in the native title context.

Some of you would know me as the Chairman of Indigenous Business Australia and as the co Chair of the Community Indigenous Volunteers. What I really stand for is for the development of our peoples and as Chairman of the Seisia community I get to go beyond the rhetoric to put in place real measures for the development of my community and its residents.

When I contemplated today's presentation I was also reflecting on the recent celebrations of the 1967 referendum and how we have made significant strides in terms of land rights and native title settlements in the States and Territories

But what concerns me is that there seems to be a disconnect between regaining an acceptance of our rights and connection to the land to our ability to develop our lands for our children and our grandchildren.

As a young man I was taught that certain alignments of the stars and certain weather patterns meant we could expect to hunt and gather food from the land and the sea. Things were predictable and mother earth provided for our needs.

In today's environment the stars tell us one thing but the weather tells us another and the patterns and habits of the animals is also changing, not because of anything our people have done but because of the Global changes that are occurring.

I have for a number of years been saying at this and other forums that we have to adapt to the changing economic environment and start to look at ways we and our children can move from the devastating effects of welfare dependency to finding ways of participating in the mainstream economy.

We have a number of very good examples of progress but I have to say that my observation is that we are still failing to treat economic development as anything other than a set of words. I like to be able to point to positive examples of what has been achieved and I want to stop talking about what could be. Talk is cheap but actions are the means by which we can be seriously measured.

At this forum I have a simple message and that is that we should be looking at ways of not only negotiating for our rights to land but that we must also look at ways we can explore new economic horizons to make use of our land for the prosperity of our future generations.



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A lot of people say to me that there are issues like remoteness and the lack of local industries. My response is if I can do it at Seisia, which is one of the remotest parts of the country then it is possible to develop in most other parts of the country.

I can share stories of Indigenous commercial successes, of great examples of partnerships with industry and joint ventures and of the possibilities that come with economic independence.

These stories are from Indigenous Australia, and some of you here today are part of these successes. For those of you who aspire to this, let me tell you that there are many opportunities for you, as individuals, family groups and communities to share in Australia's wealth, and there are many people who can help you get there – the first step is up to you.

Let me just turn to Indigenous Business Australia for a moment

- IBA started out with the idea that for Indigenous people to engage in economic development we need to build assets to create wealth
- In order to advance the commercial and economic interests of Indigenous Australians we need to accumulate and build a substantial asset base
- We enter into commercial ventures that have the potential to create local and sustainable economic outcomes – to provide jobs and hope for our people
- We believe that we need industry experts to help us maximise our investments, so our joint venturing arrangements reflect this – our commercial partners are industry experts
- IBA enters commercial partners with Indigenous communities and industry partners with a clear exit strategy that enables the Indigenous partners to buy out IBA equity in the business when they are ready
- IBA then re-invests profits into further commercial successes

This is how many non-Indigenous Australians do it, and this is what we have to work towards if we are going to change economic participation of our future generations

The main point is that IBA can assist but the main elements are leadership, vision and opportunity. When I look at my community I feel a responsibility to show leadership and vision for the future and I look for ways to provide jobs and an income stream into the community.

The way this was done was we identified some basic opportunities like the community store and we built it into a viable and growing business, we looked at our petrol station and added some services and allowed it to operate as a commercial venture, we noticed a lot of tourists visiting the Cape so we set up a campground area and a restaurant and we noticed visitors wanted to fish so we invited some professional fishermen to operate from our community and then we added cabins for the fishermen to hire.

We have also turned our minds to beef production where we grow some of our needs on a property we purchased in the tablelands and we are now supplying other communities as well as our own.



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We have a number of other projects in mind but our activities are all aimed at building an asset base and the means to become self sustaining. We still have a long way to go but we are also providing the means for better incomes and real jobs in the community.

**2. Commercial opportunities in native title**

**I would now like to return to the issues I raised at the beginning of my presentation**

- As all of us here know, the native title arena is affected by an enormous range of issues and our fundamental beliefs are tied up in the decisions we make. There are so many issues to be resolved but in reality negotiations and determinations are proceeding.
- There are also opportunities
- These opportunities can be in form of cultural tourism, provision of services, creating and selling art and crafts, transport, aquaculture and horticulture activities, providing labour to construction and mining industries, retail and wholesale ventures, bush tucker and land and water management opportunities and the list can go on as far as your imagine can take you

I consider it a responsibility of all of us to consider not only how to gain access to the lands our forefathers entrusted to us but how we can adapt to this modern capitalist society and how we too can take our place in the economic prosperity of this country

It often distresses me when I see opportunities being ignored or when the communities are not even told of the opportunities available to them. I don't believe that our future is dependant on what Governments hand out to our people. We don't need the senior Beauracrats to throw boiled sweets at us nor do we need to rely on CDEP. My vision is for our communities to be able to provide the means for our children to get a better education and to aspire to a future which offers more than boredom and addictions to grog and drugs.

The way forward must give our children a real future and if I can play my part in that future I am happy to help.

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