



A new journey together

Traditional Owners' Vision
for the Future of Nhulunbuy
and the Gove Peninsula

Gove Peninsula
Futures Reference Group

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This document includes Yolŋu Matha translations in Dhuwala language.

The word Nāpaki means non-Aboriginal people; similar to the term Balanda (European people).

Photos by Rio Tinto, AFLNT - Gove, Gumatj Corporation, Developing East Arnhem Limited, Nhulunbuy Corporation Limited.

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This document describes Rirratjinu and Gumatj Traditional Owners’ vision for the future, after the Gove bauxite mine closes.

Dhuwalanydja maṇḍangu Rirratjinuwu ga Gumatjgu nhānharawu ṇāthil’yunarawu marr ṇilimurru yurru djāma rrambanj ga ṇurikina bala ṇunhi mine yurru dhawaryun.

Rirratjinu and Gumatj are among the many Yolŋu clans of the Miwatj region of North-East Arnhem Land. Yolŋu have been custodians of this land since time began.

Rirratjinu ga Gumatj Bāpurru maṇḍanha. Yolŋu yukurra nhina wāṇa-waṭaṇu dhuwala Miwatjṇuranydja. Yolŋu nhininyṇu mala dhiyakuwuy waṇawuy.

This vision has been prepared on behalf of Rirratjinu and Gumatj Traditional Owners by the Gove Peninsula Futures Reference Group. The Reference Group includes Rirratjingu Aboriginal Corporation, Gumatj Corporation, the Northern Land Council, the Northern Territory Government, the Australian Government and Rio Tinto.

In May 2020, the Reference Group made a statement on the future of the Gove Peninsula, where all parties committed to working together to achieve a positive future for Nhulunbuy and the Gove Peninsula after the Gove bauxite mine closes.

This vision builds on that statement. It is a foundational document for the Reference Group, and will provide a starting point for discussions with residents, businesses, organisations and other Yolŋu clans on the Gove Peninsula.

A new journey

Rio Tinto is preparing to close the Gove bauxite mine in approximately 2030. When this happens, land on the Gove Peninsula will be returned to Yolŋu.

Rio Tinto yukurra dhal'yuna dhuwala Bauxite mine-nydja. Dunhi walala yurru dhal'yundja ŋayi yurru wāŋanydja roŋiyirri wāŋa-waŋanuwalana Yolŋu'yulŋuwala.



This is the beginning of a new journey together. Today's leaders have the responsibility to look forward.

Dhuwalanydja yana ŋilimurru yurru ŋurru-yirr'yuna yukurra ŋurukuna bala yalalanumirri dhuwalanydja yuŋa dhukarr.

Yolŋu will set the direction for the future, and work with others to make it a reality.

Yuwalkkuma yilimurru yurru limurr dhu rāl-manapanmirri djāma ga Yolŋu yurru dhukarr.

In the 1960s, when the Australian Government approved mining on our land, Yolŋu did not get a say. Ancestors from all our Clans came together to protest on top of Nhulun. Yolŋu presented the Australian Government with the Yirrkala bark petitions. But our protests were not heard.

We brought our case to the Supreme Court, but the Court did not recognise our rights. This was many years before the High Court's *Mabo* decision where native title was recognised under the Australian common law.

Inspired by our struggle, Parliament passed the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976, which recognised all of the land in East Arnhem as Yolŋu land. By that time, however, leases over mining areas and the township of Nhulunbuy had already been granted.

In May 2011, the Gove Traditional Owners Agreement was signed with Rirratjingu, Gumatj and Galpu Traditional Owners, the Northern Land Council and Rio Tinto. The Agreement gave approval for bauxite mining to continue and provided ongoing benefits for Traditional Owners.

When Rio Tinto leases end, land will be returned to Traditional Owners. There will be changes and challenges over the coming years as we transition from mining. But this place is special, and the people and businesses of the Gove Peninsula are strong. We will use this moment to create new opportunities.

Traditional Owners' vision

The Gove Peninsula is one of the most special places in Australia.

Our vision is to rejuvenate the region. It will be a place for us to share our culture, and a business and services hub for all of Arnhem Land.

We will work together to create a stronger and more secure future for generations of Yolŋu and Njāpaki (non-Aboriginal people) to come.

Gove Peninsula-nydja dhuwala dhapirrk wāŋa dhuwala Australia.

Dilimurrunguŋu nhānharanydja ŋilimurru yurru sharing ŋilimurrunguwuy culture, business ga services dhiyala Arnhem Landŋuru.

Marr ŋilimurru yurru djāma rrambaŋi ŋurikina bala yalalanjimirri wu Yolŋuwu ga Dāpakiwu.

Recognition of Traditional Owners.

Dharaŋan wāŋa-waŋaŋunha malanha.

Yolŋu are recognised as Traditional Owners of the Gove Peninsula, and people who come to this region will respect our land and our culture.

Yolŋu and Njāpaki together.

Yolŋu ga Dāpaki rrambaŋi.

Yolŋu and Njāpaki will live and work together in harmony in Nhulunbuy, as a leading example for the rest of Australia.

Connecting with culture and country.

Rrambaŋikuma bala wāŋalili, Romlili, ga Culturelili.

Mining has changed our lands, but Yolŋu history and songlines remain. Nhulunbuy will be a place for us to share our culture with the world.

A diverse economy.

Yaka yurru djāma wāŋanygala miŋtiwala marr ŋilimurru yuru djāma rrambaŋi ga wiripu-wiripu djāma.

The Gove Peninsula will be a place for new business ideas, building on its special location and history. We will have a diverse economy with a choice of jobs.

Nhulunbuy as a services hub.

Nhulunŋura base yurru djingaryun yalalawu marr yurru gunga'yun Yolŋunha.

Nhulunbuy will be a hub for people from across Arnhem Land to access education, training and health services.

Rejuvenating Nhulunbuy.

Djāma Nhulunbuyinha yuŋakuma.

We want to keep everything that is good about Nhulunbuy, and improve it. Our vision is to maintain a sustainable population and create an exciting, well-managed community.

Infrastructure ready for the future.

Djāma Nhulunbuyinha laŋju ga ŋāthilmiriyama yalalawu marr yurru wāŋa djāma manyakkuma balanyara biŋjan dhukkar, bāwa, houses, airport.

We will have reliable, affordable essential services and quality infrastructure to support a good quality of life and a strong economy.

Town, communities and homelands strong together.

Nhulunbuy, Yirrkala, Gunyānara ga Homeland yurru djāma rrambaŋi.

Yolŋu will be able to live safely, happily and with dignity in nearby communities and homelands. The whole region will be connected.



Each element of Traditional Owners’ vision for Nhulunbuy and the Gove Peninsula is described in detail below.

Recognition of Traditional Owners.

Yolŋu are recognised as Traditional Owners of the Gove Peninsula.

We want people who come here to know the history of this place. They should understand our strengths and have respect for our land, culture, language and independent way of life; just as we will recognise and respect people from all the other cultures here.

Our Clans will be involved in decision-making, including town governance in Nhulunbuy.

Connecting with culture and country.

Mining has changed our lands, but Yolŋu history, culture and songlines remain. Our Clans will reconnect with our traditional lands in Nhulunbuy and surrounding areas.

We have sites that are sacred. Nhulun (also known as Mount Saunders) is a sacred place for Rirratjingu, and there are beaches and waterholes sacred to Gumatj and Galpu Clans. We will manage access to these sacred areas and protect them from inappropriate development.

Yolŋu and Nāpaki together.

Nhulunbuy will be a place for Yolŋu and Nāpaki to live and work together. Many Nāpaki were born here, and we have a lot of Nāpaki friends here. Nhulunbuy is a great place for people to live, work and relax. We want Nāpaki to stay and work together with Yolŋu: learning Yolŋu-way, and sharing Nāpaki-way.

For Yolŋu, Nhulunbuy is a place where people can choose to live independently and go to work, while staying close to their families in Yirrkala, Gunyara and homelands. It is a place for Yolŋu who need to live close to services – including older people who need medical care and other support. In the future, more Yolŋu will have access to good quality housing in Nhulunbuy, and some Yolŋu may return from Darwin to be closer to family.

The Gove Peninsula will be a leading example of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people working together and exchanging knowledge.

A diverse economy.

We will create a diverse and innovative economy, with a choice of jobs. With the mine closing, the Gove Peninsula will become a place for new business ideas and partnerships, building on our special location and history.

Yolŋu are on a journey towards economic independence. We have been building wealth through our own businesses and creating jobs for Yolŋu. We want to grow our existing businesses, and develop new industries in Nhulunbuy and the wider region.

We want to work in partnership with existing businesses and bring new investment to the region. We seek partners that value our people's knowledge and want to work with Yolŋu in a commercial way.

We have a vision for Nhulunbuy to be a base for tourism in East Arnhem; a gateway for us to share our culture and language with the rest of Australia and the world.

Working with partners, we also want to create new opportunities in industries such as education and research, health and aged care, fisheries, transport and logistics, defence, forestry and land management.

We want Yolŋu to own businesses in Nhulunbuy and earn income for communities, and for Yolŋu to take on new jobs. We have a vision for Yolŋu to be working across all different roles, with on-the-job training and pathways into management.

Traditional Owners will be involved in town governance and will make decisions about land tenure that support this vision. Nhulunbuy will remain as an open town. People will be able to come and go freely and buy and sell interests in land in a commercial way – without needing approval from Traditional Owners. This will ensure there is a strong economy in Nhulunbuy, with certainty for businesses and investors in land.

Nhulunbuy as a services hub.

Traditional Owners have a vision for Nhulunbuy as a services and training hub for all of Arnhem Land.

Yolŋu from East Arnhem and Njāpaki from across the Northern Territory and other places will come to Nhulunbuy for jobs, training and education. There will be training centres and universities in town, so that Yolŋu and Njāpaki don't need to leave the region to get good training.

There will be good quality schooling in Nhulunbuy, so that families can choose between school in community or in town. Nhulunbuy will offer a full choice of education options for young people – including pathways to jobs, training and university. Schools should be a bridge between the Yolŋu and Njāpaki worlds, with two-way exchange of culture.

Nhulunbuy will also be a hub for health and aged-care services, so that Yolŋu can stay near family instead of going to Darwin for care. We want doctors, nurses and medical staff to live here, to help look after our old people, and to train Yolŋu to do this work. Yolŋu will take on more jobs in delivering services and maintaining facilities in the town.

The services that are important for Yolŋu are also important for Njāpaki, and Njāpaki will also use them. It is much better for services to be delivered in East Arnhem, instead of people having to travel to Darwin. By making Nhulunbuy a services hub, there is an opportunity to save money for government and improve our quality of life.



Rejuvenating Nhulunbuy.

Our vision is to keep everything that is good about Nhulunbuy, and improve it. We want to keep the population large enough so that there are jobs in the region and sustainable services, so that people can access what they need to live a good life.

With Rio Tinto leaving, there is an opportunity to improve the design of the town. We will make Nhulunbuy an exciting town, with more spaces for people to mix and more choices for shopping and dining, led by Yolŋu and Njāpaki entrepreneurs.

Our vision is to enhance community and sports facilities to make Nhulunbuy a healthy and exciting community, with more programs to make sure that town facilities are used by Yolŋu. We will host sports competitions and exchanges, bringing together clubs and communities from across East Arnhem and the rest of Australia.

We will work towards this vision for Nhulunbuy in balance with our other goals. We will ensure Nhulunbuy is well-managed, with good management of alcohol to prevent harmful drinking.

Infrastructure ready for the future.

To support a positive future after mine closure, we need investment in appropriate infrastructure.

People living on the Gove Peninsula will have access to reliable, affordable and environmentally sustainable electricity. We need improved water, sewerage and telecommunications services.

We want investment in infrastructure to connect up our region and make it affordable for people and goods to move around. Upgrades to the Central Arnhem Road and the Gove Port will be important to achieving our vision for the economy. We need to maintain the Gove Airport, with regular and affordable flights so that residents can visit family and tourists can visit our region.

With infrastructure ready for the future, we will be able to maintain the population of the region and provide the quality of services that Yolŋu and Njāpaki need for a good life.

Town, communities and homelands strong together.

Nhulunbuy will be an important hub for our region into the future. Alongside Nhulunbuy, Yolŋu have our own communities on the Gove Peninsula which we call home.

Rirratjŋu and Gumatj Clans have existing plans for development in Yirrkala and Gunyarrara, respectively. Each Yolŋu Clan also has its own homelands. In the 1970s we began to establish a different way of life in our own homelands, blending old ways and new.

Yolŋu should be able to live safely, happily and with dignity in communities and homelands on the Gove Peninsula. This is no less important than investing in the future of Nhulunbuy. We want better housing and less overcrowding in communities and homelands. We want good facilities and services; greater local employment opportunities; higher education levels, improved living standards and stable investment by government.

Our vision is for a region where communities, homelands and Nhulunbuy are strong together. We will plan for them together, with flexibility so that Yolŋu can move between living in Nhulunbuy and in communities and homelands. Our businesses will operate across the whole region, with access to good transport and infrastructure.



Guiding principles for transition

There will be changes and challenges as we prepare for mine closure.

We ask stakeholders to observe these guiding principles.



1. The Traditional Owner vision must be at the centre.

Buraŋur yan nhānhawuy wāŋa-waŋaŋudja.

We invite all stakeholders to support Traditional Owners to achieve this vision, in recognition of our rights as custodians of the Gove Peninsula. By putting this vision at the centre, we can plan and invest for the long-term.

2. We will work together with unity among the Clans and in partnership with Njāpaki.

Dilimurru yurru djāma rrambanji future-wu malanha Yolŋu ga Ḍāpaki.

Through the Gove Peninsula Futures Reference Group, we will work in a spirit of trust and openness. Our Clans must have an ongoing voice in decisions, and we will need the best information to guide us.

3. We should start making decisions now, to create certainty for the future.

Dhiyaŋunawala ŋilimurru yurru djāmanydja marrtji djambina ga romdja ga ŋāthil'yundja djāma ga ŋuku-nhirrpanmirri.

To achieve our vision, we must not wait until mine closure. Traditional Owners will put in place new land tenure arrangements as soon as possible to provide certainty for residents and businesses. Other stakeholders must do their part by investing in infrastructure, developing new industries and creating pathways for Yolŋu into jobs.

4. Transition should create opportunities and not problems for Yolŋu.

Dhuwalanydja yukurra wekama ganydjarr Yolŋuwu gay aka ŋonunguma Yolŋunha ga yātj wekama.

Mining began without Yolŋu having a say. We do not want to be left with problems after it ends (such as poor housing or infrastructure). We are working together with Rio Tinto under the Gove Peninsula Traditional Owners Agreement to make decisions about rehabilitating land, retaining assets and creating opportunities for Yolŋu businesses during transition.

5. We must empower our young people, who are our future leaders.

Dilimurru yurru Ganydjarr wekama yutanha Yolŋunha bili walala ŋilimurrungu.

Our young leaders have helped write this vision. They will be our voice in the future. We should provide support for them to develop as leaders and involve them in making decisions.

6. We should think in new ways.

Guyaŋinyaranydja ŋilimurrungunu marrtji djambina yuŋakumana.

The history of the Gove Peninsula is unique, and we are beginning a new journey. Stakeholders must embrace new ideas. Yolŋu and Njāpaki have different knowledge and world views. We will share our knowledge, and we ask others to listen and understand us.

The Gove Peninsula Futures Reference Group has set up five key streams of work to begin implementing this vision and support transition:

Land Tenure

- Supporting effective transition from the current town Special Purposes Leases to new tenure arrangements under the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976.
- Master planning for Nhulunbuy.

Economic development and transition

- Maximising the benefits to the region from mine closure work, town transition and long-term monitoring.
- Supporting existing businesses to grow and diversify.
- Building the capability of the local workforce.
- Facilitating investment in new industries.
- Ensuring housing for industry growth.
- Fostering respectful partnerships with Yolŋu businesses.

Essential services and infrastructure

- Transition of essential services to new authorities, including power generation and distribution, water, and sewerage.
- Securing and improving enabling infrastructure such as key roads, telecommunications, ports and airports.

Community and government services

- Sustaining and strengthening core government and community services to support Nhulunbuy as a regional services hub for East Arnhem.
- Supporting regionalisation of Government services.

Town governance

- Supporting the transition of Nhulunbuy into a gazetted Local Government Area.
- Putting in place new arrangements for town governance and municipal services.



Achieving this vision together

We invite you to read and understand this vision. Consider what it means for you and your work and how we could work together to create a strong future.

Rirratjinu and Gumatj Traditional Owners understand the important role that others will play on this new journey together.

We pay respect to other Yolŋu Clans who have connections here, as well as the many Nāpaki families and businesses who are committed to this region.

Wāŋa-waŋaŋumirri yukurra buku-wekama wiripunha malanha Bāpurrunha Yolŋunha dhiyala, ga Dāpakinha families-nha ga businesses dhiyala wāŋaŋura (Gove Peninsula).



To share your support for this vision, make a comment or express interest in being part of further discussions, please complete the form at <https://haveyoursay.nt.gov.au/traditional-owner-vision-for-the-gove-peninsula>.

Traditional Owners request that you provide your feedback directly to the Gove Peninsula Futures Reference Group using this online form.

Yolŋu are also welcome to talk to the Northern Land Council in Nhulunbuy or to speak with Gumatj and Rirratjinu leaders.

Danapurru djäl ŋanapur yurru ŋāma nhaltjan nhuma yukurra gyaŋirri. Ga ŋunhi nhe yurru maŋŋ'marama waniya Northern Land Council-wala ga wiripunyda Gumatj wo Rirratjinuwala ŋurruwarryunamirriwala.

