

National Indigenous Times acquired by Wayne Bergmann's 'pro-business' syndicate

ABC Kimberley

By [Ben Collins](#)

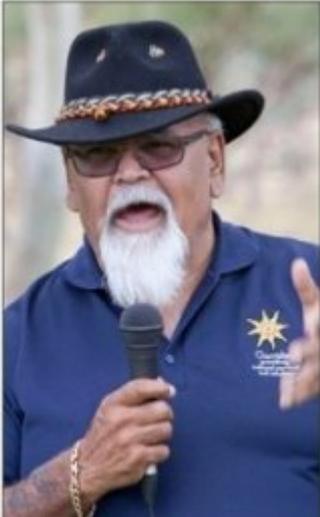
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By National Indigenous Times reporter Gerry Georgatos



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PHOTO: The last issue of the National Indigenous Times published before its parent company Destiny Publications went into voluntary administration. (Image: The NIT website)

A syndicate described as "pro-business", that includes former Kimberley Land Council CEO Wayne Bergmann and West Australian journalist Tony Barrass, have acquired ownership of the financially troubled Indigenous newspaper.

The successful acquisition comes after they failed to acquire the business shortly after the National Indigenous Times' (NIT) went into voluntary administration in January 2015, reportedly over mounting legal bills.

"We pulled out last year and discovered the NIT, wasn't sold from the liquidators, so we then launched a new bid and were successful," Mr Bergmann told Vanessa Mills on ABC Kimberley Local Radio.

The original syndicate also included Indigenous academic Macia Langton and Indigenous businessman Clinton Wolf, and was described as "pro-business" by the Australian newspaper.

Mr Bergmann said that the makeup of the new NIT ownership was yet to be finalised.

"I'm still in commercial discussions with a range of Indigenous investors to finalise the final makeup, and they don't want to be known publically at this stage," he said.

Mr Bergmann is best known for being a passionate advocate for the James Price Point LNG precinct north of Broome, and for brokering more than one billion dollar compensation package for traditional owners, when he headed up the Kimberley Land Council.

The industrial development was scrapped in 2013 when Woodside Petroleum determined it would not be financially viable.

Battle of ideologies



PHOTO: Wayne Bergmann has gained ownership of the National Indigenous Times, along with WA journalist Tony Barrass. (ABC: Ben Collins)

Mr Bergmann said the success of the NIT will depend on fearless and impartial journalism.

"It can't be a one-sided business, it's got to have a balanced view of basically, a whole range of people's opinions," he said.

"I think it will be a provocative paper, providing an insight into a whole range of issues."

Control of the NIT appears to have been subject to a clash of ideologies with a rival syndicate, reportedly made up of academics and Indigenous activists competing for ownership of the paper.

A 2015 pamphlet appealing for donations on behalf of the rival syndicate expressed an anti-mining sentiment.

"It is vital that NIT stays in the hands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, who understand and appreciate the impact of government policy upon communities, and the terrible impact of mining upon country," it said.

Mr Bergmann said Mr Barrass will become the editor-in-chief of the NIT and will ensure impartiality.

"I think Tony Barass comes with a long history of being an editor in the Australian [newspaper] and has a strong reputation of publishing without fear or favour," he said.

Low-cost model

Mr Bergmann hoped to turn the fortunes of the NIT around, by keeping overheads low, while filling a gap in the Australian media landscape.

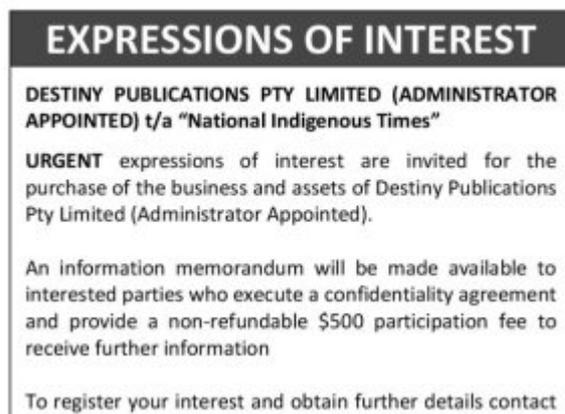


PHOTO: The National Indigenous Times' administrators placed this advertisement in a metro daily newspaper on Saturday.

"In this day and age, most people can work from their homes, you don't need a major shopfront to produce this," he said.

"So we think the capital start-up costs are quite low.

"We've been talking to a range of Aboriginal people from around Australia on contributing."

Senior journalism lecturer at Edith Cowan University Kayt Davies, said that new ownership of the NIT was good news for Australian media diversity.

"I'm always happy to hear that there is a diversity of media available, and that there's someone willing to invest in a media product," she said.

Dr Davies believes the new owners will be able to prevent their private interests from influencing the NIT's editorial perspective.

"Tony Barrass has good pedigree as a journalist from earlier in his career, and certainly would know the difference between pushing an agenda and reporting a story," she said.

Mr Bergmann said that there was an imbalance of negative stories about Indigenous people in Australia, and the NIT will work to change this.

"Most news feeds about Aboriginal people are generally doom and gloom. We're trying to bring a bit more balance," Mr Bergmann said.

The National Indigenous Times hopes to relaunch in March 2016.