

By **WARREN MUNDINE**

In the 1980s, Geoffrey Cousins was one of Australia's most successful advertising executives, bringing us those "You can't say no" ads, which he called a "great piece of creativity", for CCs corn chips. "It's selling a hell of a lot of corn chips," he said in 1982.

Having become a multi-millionaire from people stuffing their faces with corn chips, and corn chip packets stuffing landfills and waterways, Cousins became a self-styled environmental warrior.

He now convinces governments, courts and banks to effectively "say no" to jobs in some of Australia's poorest communities.

Wayne Bergmann is a Nyikina man from Western Australia. He is a former boilermaker-welder, lawyer and businessman, and a tireless campaigner for Aboriginal economic participation. As Kimberley Land Council CEO, he represented traditional owners negotiating a native title agreement with Woodside Petroleum in 2011 for a gas hub at James Price Point near Broome.

Many Kimberley Aborigines live in abject poverty. The project promised benefits across the region, including jobs and business opportunities, funding for literacy, education, healthcare and culture, and a huge local economic boost.

It didn't happen. Cousins led a relentless campaign of protests and legal challenges. Compliance and environmental costs were around \$1 billion, representing 25 per cent of the cost of construction. The plan blew out costs so Woodside abandoned the project as uneconomic.

Green activism is threatening Aboriginal economic development all over Australia. In 2009, to secure Greens election preferences, the Queensland Labor government declared three Cape York rivers "wild rivers", preventing land developments such as horticulture and tourism. The Wik people took five years to defeat it in court.

Cape York traditional owners now face another fight after Labor reintroduced "vegetation management" legislation, severely restricting agriculture and cattle-grazing opportunities. Gerhardt Pearson, executive director of Balkanu, which fosters local economic development, said: "Since 1873 when Cooktown opened for goldmining, our mob has been displaced and it's only since 1992 that we've been getting our land back ... This will lock up the land again ... it's the way they tried it with Wild Rivers – we fought them on that – and my message to the government is we'll fight you on this too."



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Initially the Greens supported native title, thinking Aboriginal people would use it to stop development. They imagine Aborigines living a subsistence, tribal life in the wilderness – the myth of the noble savage. Not even Aborigines still practising traditional culture live like this.

Now the Greens hate native title. In 2017, Greens senators opposed Native Title Act amendments that had been lobbied for by Aboriginal groups for a decade to make it easier to enter into land use agreements. Labor frequently appeases the Greens, courting urban votes.

Green activists will find a handful of Aboriginal people who oppose a project, give them a prominent platform and deceive the public that they represent everyone. James Price Point activists refused to meet elders who supported the project but backed a minority group whom the court ruled in 2017 weren't even traditional owners there.

Likewise the Adani project in Queensland, which Cousins is also campaigning against. Adani negotiated native title agreements with four traditional owner groups, including the Wangan and Jagalingou (W&J) People Native Title Claim Group, which voted 294 to 1 to approve an agreement with Adani in 2016.

But activists are backing a W&J native title applicant who opposes the mine. He leads a rival W&J organisation that doesn't hold native title and is challenging the agreement in court, so far unsuccessfully.

Reportedly, the move is financially supported by the Sunrise Project, run by John Hepburn, formerly of Greenpeace, and multi-millionaire Wotif.com founder Graeme Wood. Wood was also instrumental in closing the Gunns woodchip mill in Triabunna, Tasmania, Australia's poorest state. He bought it and shut it down, promising to establish a tourism business. Seven years later the site still sits undeveloped and jobless.

I'm not aware of any regional development project Green activists have supported, be it in resources, agriculture, infrastructure or any other industry. In the US, activists even oppose solar farms in deserts.

Green activism isn't about conservation. It's far-left ideology opposing all development, even Western civilisation; ideology that says Australia shouldn't be touched beyond its current development.

The acronym is BANANA: build absolutely nothing anywhere near anything. It's peddled by fly-in-fly-out activists who, after destroying local jobs, go back to their privileged lives, urban mansions and jetsetting careers.

For Aboriginal people on traditional lands, it means choosing between poverty or leaving their country and moving to urban areas. And it's the enemy of Australia's regions, which are crying out for a broader economic base. Interviewed on my TV program *Mundine Means Business* in 2018, Kimberley Land Council's Bergmann said:

"The system failed us because it allowed people who legally can't be made accountable to wreck this opportunity for the region. And I think it's wrecked an opportunity for the state."

He's right. The system needs to change.