Elders smoke Supreme Court

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YANYUA elders from Borroloola presented a united front at the NT Supreme Court yesterday.

About 30 community members travelled to Darwin to support the challenge of Commonwealth approval of the NT's largest zinc mine - the McArthur River Mine (MRM).

Elders conducted a smoking ceremony and dance outside the court, which was filmed by an American crew documenting the group's struggle to preserve the sacred site.

Producer/director Christopher McLeod, who has been filming the group for about seven days, said their story would be part of a 12-episode documentary looking at the work of indigenous peoples to protect sites.

And after more than a decade of international research, he said Aboriginal people were "struggling to maintain what they have left of their culture. I think Aboriginal people have it tough here," Mr McLeod said.
"The English colonial system is very tough. There is inherent racism.

"Similar to the American Indians ... Aboriginal communities have been devastated by the theft of land and massacres and very poor economic conditions because they've been pushed onto marginal land.

"And alcohol can have a big impact in that situation. They are struggling ... to revive and bring their culture back against very long odds."

Set down for three days in the Federal Court, the court case will see traditional owners argue that the former federal environment minister Ian Campbell failed to take into account mandatory considerations and procedures.

The $110 million expansion diverts the river for 5.5km.