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HISTORIC MOVE: Pictured at Baiame Cave, Milbrodale are (l - r) Wonnarua Nation Aboriginal Corporation chief executive officer, Laurie Perry, Wonnarua member, Arthur-Kauwul Fletcher, Environment Minister, Robyn Parker, and Wonnarua Elders Group vice chair, Maxine Conaty.

Nation's first

By Louise Nichols

A PARCEL of land near Broke is the site of the country's first Aboriginal owned and managed biobank.

It is also the Hunter Valley's first biobank and to mark this historic step a special ceremony was held at the sacred Baiame Cave, at Milbrodale, yesterday.

Baiame Cave overlooks the Milbrodale valley and contains a rock drawing of Baiame, the Wonnarua nation's creator, law giver and protector.

The land at Broke, known as "Valley Arm", is owned by the Wonnarua nation and covers 75 hectares including a 10 hectare endangered ecological community.

Under the biobank arrangement the land has now been permanently set aside for con-

servation to be cared for in perpetuity by the Wonnarua people.

The land joins the Yengo National Park and is surrounded by native vegetation and its inclusion as a biobank will enable the Wonnarua people to renew their custodial care for the land and assist with training and employment outcomes.

The \$900,000 funding for the biobank is the result of 24 months of negotiations between representatives of the Wonnarua Nation Aboriginal Corporation and companies behind the building of the Minimbah to Maitland railway expansion.

The three companies involved in building the third track are jointly called the Hunter8Alliance and consist of the Australian Rail Track Corporation, John

Holland and the environmental and engineering consultancy firm GHD.

Under the project's consent conditions the companies had to provide vegetation offset to replace the native vegetation cleared to make way for the third rail track.

Wonnarua Nation Aboriginal Corporation chief executive officer, Laurie Perry, who has been heavily engaged in the negotiations, said the property was a perfect biobank site and he wanted to encourage other Aboriginal communities to follow the Wonnarua lead and establish similar sites.

"The biobank arrangement will provide employment for our community members and ensure the property is preserved for future generations," Mr Perry said.

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