

LAND RIGHTS NEWS

NORTHERN EDITION



NORTHERN
LAND COUNCIL

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BARUNGA 2026 SPECIAL



Claravale Station P11



Mimal IPA P23



After the flood P7

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EDITORIAL

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NLC CONTACTS

Contact the *Land Rights News* team at media@nlc.org.au.

Northern Land Council
29 Julius St
Berrimah NT 0828

(08) 8920 5100

nlc.org.au

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FRONT COVER



Bungul dancers stole the stage in Barunga Festival 2026, showcasing stories and culture for all to enjoy.

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Chair statement



MATTHEW RYAN

AFTER a huge and seemingly endless Wet season, the Dry weather is here in the Top End.

The weather might have changed, but we are still feeling the impacts of the record flooding that affected so many of our communities right across the Territory.

Another matter that continues to concern Traditional Owners and community members is people accessing our land and sea country without permits. Issues such as housing, child protection laws, youth justice and health, also need strong leadership from the Aboriginal community.

In June this year, we met with all Regional Councils, held three NLC Executive Council meetings, hosted a joint council meeting with all four Land Councils, and organised and delivered

a full council meeting in Gunbalanya.

Through the busyness, there has been much to celebrate, with events like the Barunga Festival, the declaration of a new Indigenous Protected Area at Weemol, and the launch of a new boat for the Kenbi Rangers.

We're hearing that many people in our region are very disappointed and feel that the Northern Territory Government is failing Aboriginal people in the Top End.

We see this lack of support in the proposed changes to the Child Protection Act, we see it in the poor response from the Finocchiaro government to the closing down of the Nathan River Mine and the loss of income and compensation to Traditional Owners, and we see it in the treatment of people impacted by flooding in Daly River, Palumpa, Katherine, Beswick, Arnhem Land, in Kakadu, and other communities.

Most community members who were evacuated earlier this year are now happy to be home. But many homes

are still in substandard states, as are basic services in these communities. In Palumpa, there is still only a pop-up school, and there is still a lot of silt in many homes in Daly River.

We have consistently called on the NT Government to do better for these communities. We have not forgotten this issue. We will continue to pressure both federal and territory governments to review and improve their emergency responses to flooding in preparation for next year's wet season.

We all need to be proactive. We can't just sit back and hope for the best. We need to accept that the Northern Territory Government does not have our best interests at heart.

Going forward, we will work together with other stakeholders - with the other NT Land Councils, with peak bodies, and with other Aboriginal organisations in the NT.

We also plan to travel to Canberra to talk directly to the federal government about our concerns.



From left: CLC Chair Warren Japanangka Williams, NLC Chair Matthew Ryan, and NLC Director of Leadership Dorrelle Anderson.

Four Territory land councils call on the Commonwealth to hold NT Government to account

The four land councils stand united against the NT Government's attacks on Aboriginal people

THE Northern, Central, Tiwi and Anindilyakwa land councils say there must be consequences for the NT Government's failures for not achieving Closing the Gap targets, calling on the Commonwealth to take action.

In the Northern Territory, only two of the 19 Closing the Gap targets are on track. This is the worst in Australia.

In a joint statement published in June, the land councils said the Commonwealth Government must not give the NT Government money until there is evidence of big improvements against priority reforms and targets and fund Aboriginal Community Controlled organisations that have the trust and ability to deliver programs and services to their communities.

The statement was written after the land councils met at Barunga, the place where Aboriginal leaders first called for a treaty 38 years ago.

Over two days, leaders from the four land councils discussed issues in their regions, as well as the bigger issues of health, justice, community safety and the cost of living.

During the meeting, the councillors highlighted the importance of 50 years of the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act, the first law to legally recognise Aboriginal peoples' deep and enduring relationship to country and return land to Traditional Owners.

The Land Rights Act has been integral in the fight for self-determination.

However, despite the recognition of land and sea rights, NLC Chair Matthew Ryan said Aboriginal people continued to face many of the same challenges.

"Almost half of the land mass in the Northern Territory and 85 per cent of our Territory coastlines are Aboriginal owned. We have our land and sea rights, but our people are still fighting an endless battle for our very existence," Chair Ryan said.

Chair of the Central Land Council, Warren Williams, said that like all Territorians, Aboriginal people wanted a good life for their future generations.

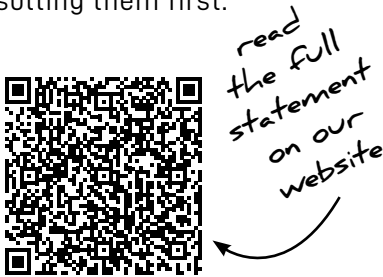
Chair Williams said unfortunately that was becoming impossible.

"We want a good life on our traditional lands, yet despite years of advocacy, remote housing is poorly maintained and poorly designed, education is failing our children, and the high cost of living makes us vulnerable to preventable diseases that are cutting our lives short," Chair Williams said.

Cherelle Wurrawilya, Anindilyakwa Land Council Chair, added that the issues the land council were raising were basic human rights.

"We are not asking for much – safe housing, healthy communities, and a justice system we can trust. The basic rights that every person in Australia should enjoy," Chair Wurrawilya said.

The land councils said they would continue to fight against governments that make decisions affecting Aboriginal people without consulting them first.



Land Council leaders: Warren Japanangka Williams, Central Land Council Chair; Cherelle Wurrawilya, Anindilyakwa Land Council Chair; Austin Wonaeamirri, Tiwi Land Council Deputy Chair; and Matthew Ryan, Northern Land Council Chair, at the joint land council meetings in Barunga in June 2026.



Attendees at the joint land council meeting held in Barunga in June 2026.

Q&A

NORTHERN LAND COUNCIL

Land Rights News spoke to two new

SHARATINE CAMPBELL

Northern Land Council member representing the Yarralin community in the Victoria River District (VRD) regional, 300km south-west of Katherine.

Sharatine works at the Victoria Daly Regional Council as the Assistant Manager for Council Operations.

Q What is it like being a woman in a leadership role?

I feel respected and looked up to. I'm the only female on my team at work: there's my manager, who's my older brother, and about five or six men that do operations. We service the community, keeping the community clean, servicing the Nitjpurru airstrip and more. I grew up seeing strong women in my family, not just in Yarralin, but in other communities as well.

In Yarralin, I am often the only female that helps with the big issues in the community. But I really want that to change. I encourage other women to take on these roles as well, because I'm already on a couple of boards. I'd like to give a chance to my sisters — have a go, so we can be together and it's not just me. We want the community to take on responsibilities. It's our community.

Q Have you faced any challenges as a leader?

In community, for example, when we have community meetings and talk about things like kids running amok. We want the community to take responsibility as well, because that's their school, that's their shop, you know. But most of the time it's just us, and we'd like them to meet us halfway.

Q What inspired you to step into leadership?

My community, and the future of our kids in the community, inspired me to step up. What we're doing now is for the future — for our kids. Hopefully what we're doing now can help out with community issues.

I was encouraged to join the NLC by my family and my community, because we've been dealing with a lot of community issues.

Q Who are the strong women who inspired you growing up?

My mum — because she had to take care of a lot of kids, and she made it look easy. So, growing up, I'd say my mum. My big inspiration would have to be my father, because he's the one that has been fighting for our community — for a safe community in Yarralin. For example, he stood up for alcohol to be prohibited from Yarralin, and it's still a dry community.

I'm also inspired by Roslyn Frith and Jocelyn Victor, Chairperson and Vice Chairperson of Katherine West Health Board. She's been at it for a long time. Another woman who inspires me is Lorraine Jones (NLC deputy Chair) — she's been mentoring me and is there to support and listen. I believe these strong women are paving the way for young women.

Q What advice would you give to young Aboriginal women who want to step into leadership?

Take it on. Make your voice heard. I'd say leave the negative and personal issues aside. Put your differences aside, and just focus on what the needs of your people and your community are. We can make a difference. Because when people bring that (negativity) into meetings, it causes conflict and arguments. That happens a lot with young women. So, when it comes to community matters, put personal feelings aside and focus on the needs of the community — that's how we move forward as a community.

Q What legacy do you hope to leave for young girls in your community?

I hope I do inspire some of them. I'd like my sisters and other women to take on these roles as well, not just me. I want it to change so more women can be involved and step up together. I believe with encouragement, anyone of these women could step up and take our place.

“What we're doing now is for the future - for their kids. Hopefully what we're doing now can help out with community issues.”

COUNCIL MEMBERS

by Northern Land Council members.



Why were you interested in being a member of the Northern Land Council?

I used to be the chairman of Mabunji Aboriginal Corporation for seven years and I got to understand what the NLC does. I learned about applying for Section 19 Land Use Agreements, and through this process I got to know about leasing and the work of the NLC.

I put word out there that I was interested in joining the NLC, so people knew about my interest, and then I saw a poster about nominations and how the selection process works.. I put my hand up.

I am very interested to know how the NLC really works, how they represent my own region and also the seven regions. I've now been to two full council meetings and one Regional Council meeting.



Can you tell me about your work life?

I was employed and working as a contractor throughout my working life. When I was younger, I worked in the pastoral industry, catching wild bulls and doing other work. After that, I worked on mine sites driving trucks. I worked in the Northern Territory and New South Wales. I don't support mining, but I needed work and there are good jobs in mining. Throughout my working life, I earned money and I put money away. Now that I'm retired, it's good to have savings to rely on. I got back home in August last year, and I am very glad to be home.



What was it like working on mine sites?

I have worked on different mines, here in the NT and in NSW. Some of the differences I noticed was how they approach rehabilitation. In some mines, they rehabilitate country as they go along, like every two months, and that is good. At other mines, it doesn't happen until the mine closes. With the MacArthur

River Mine, we have a river nearby and we've had big floods. I understand that there is a lot of waste from the mine going into the river. I love fishing, and I see that the river is being damaged. I can't see any rehabilitation happening either.



What advice would you give to someone thinking about joining the NLC?

Some people say a lot of negative things about the Land Council, and I wanted to find out how things are actually done. What I have learnt since I have been on the council, is how hard everyone works. If you ask for information, the staff try to make sure you get it. There is very respectful communication at the meetings. I would encourage anyone thinking about sitting on the NLC to talk to their local member and find out what is happening in your region.



What do you hope to achieve in your time as an NLC Council Member?

I want to see things done in a way where everyone benefits. I know about mining royalties and ranger groups. I see that rangers do work on country and on sea country. I want to see that the NLC can help create jobs for younger people, whether this is ranger work or work with pastoralists, I want to see that our young people can get good jobs on country.

I also want young people to understand the history of how we have come to where we are at this point in time: negotiating with mining companies, working with government, consultations with Land Councils. Young people have to understand their history, their culture and their country. We all need to understand how to effectively work together in ways that benefit all of us.



FRAZER BAKER

Frazer Baker represents Balbarni from the Borroloola Barkly region.

He lives at Little River Station with his family, 120 kilometres east of Borroloola.

“I want to see that the NLC can help create jobs for younger people, whether this is ranger work or work with pastoralists, I want to see that our young people can get good jobs on country. ”

Rirratjingu Fuel secures milestone shipment for Nhulunbuy



RAC Chair Wanyubi Marika with CGL CEO Tony Schaffer. Credit: Rachael Schofield/RAC.

An Aboriginal-owned fuel business has set up Nhulunbuy for fuel security with its 150th milestone fuel shipment in late June and a new roadhouse plan on the books.

RIRRATJINGU Fuel is celebrating 13 years of success with a significant commercial milestone amidst an international fuel crisis.

The company is a joint venture between Rirratjingu Aboriginal

Corporation (RAC) and Cambridge Gulf Limited (CGL), serving both community and commercial needs in Nhulunbuy.

With Rio Tinto set to leave Nhulunbuy in the next few years,

Rirratjingu Fuel now supply more than 50 million litres of diesel each year across the Gove Peninsula, with more than 600 million litres delivered to date.

RAC has also entered into a memorandum of understanding with the Laynhapuy Homelands Aboriginal Corporation (LHAC) to begin talks with Traditional Owners to establish

a roadhouse along Central Arnhem Road and exploring opportunities for state and federal funding.

RAC Chairman Wanyubi Marika said with Rio Tinto planning to scale down operations in the next few years, it was important to develop sustainable businesses that supported the economic future of the region.

"Rirratjingu Fuel is a good example of our plans to shape the path forward for Rirratjingu people as we head into a new era," he said.

"We have established and maintained a secure and reliable supply chain delivering diesel from Singapore into Gove, which is one of Australia's most remote locations.

"That includes maintaining a consistent supply throughout the nation's fuel crisis that brought many industries to a halt.

"It is important to RAC that we focus on creating a future that honours our traditions and complements our cultural values and wellbeing. Improving liveability across our remote homelands reflects these values."

Mr Marika said Rirratjingu Fuel will continue to investigate expansion opportunities that would help his people build a resilient local economy beyond mining.

Jabiru Airport set to stay

Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation (GAC) will take over Jabiru Airport, saving it from demolition as part of the rehabilitation of the Ranger Uranium Mine.

THE airport was scheduled to be demolished later this year as part of the rehabilitation of the Rio Tinto Ranger Mine, leaving the Jabiru community, nearby outstations and Kakadu tourism without a major lifeline for the community during Wet season.

After long discussions between stakeholders, Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation (GAC), which represents the Mirarr Traditional Owners, decided to take over operations and keep the airport running after Rio Tinto's departure.

In an agreement struck between the Federal Government, Northern Territory Government, Northern Land Council, Rio Tinto and GAC, the

airport's rehabilitation requirements of the mine will change for the airport to continue to service the community.

The airport is a critical lifeline for local communities and businesses, providing access to emergency services and ensuring food security, health services, and supporting the local and regional economies.

GAC CEO Jessie Schaecken said this represents another significant step for Mirarr towards regaining full control over their country at Ranger.

"The Jabiru Airport is an essential service for the Kakadu region and beyond," she said.

"People can rest assured the airport will continue to serve tourists and businesses as well as the many

communities who visit Jabiru for cultural, medical and family reasons."

Months of uncertainty have come to an end for Jabiru community members, as stakeholders are working together to maintain the airport on the edge on Kakadu National Park.

ERA will continue operating Jabiru Airport until 1 March 2027 while it works with key stakeholders, including GAC, the Commonwealth Government and the Northern Territory Government, to support handover to an appropriate third-party operator.



Jabiru Airport.

After the flood: Rebuilding Daly River



James Parry outside his house in Daly River.

Almost five months after record-breaking floods swept through the Daly River community, families have returned home to rebuild their lives.

The Northern Land Council visited Daly River resident James Parry when he first returned to his home, after spending many weeks at the evacuation centres in Darwin and Batchelor.

Walking through the gates of his house, Mr Parry was uncertain about what state his house was going to be in.

"It's been months since I've seen my house," Mr Parry said.

"Last time I was here, I had two minutes to grab my stuff before we were evacuated by helicopters.

"It was really stressful. We had no warning and the water was coming up so quickly. We just had to get out."

The downstairs area of the house, which used to be bedrooms, is now covered in thick layers of mud.

"There's a lot of work to be done. Most of the stuff in my downstairs area will need to be thrown out," he said.

"I am happy to be home though. It's been really hard being away for so long."

Daly River resident and Malak Malak Traditional Owner Matthew Shields' home is also in a bad way. Until he gets a chance to clean it up, Mr Shields will need to live with family in Belyuen.

"I cleaned it all out in February, after the first flood. But now with that bigger flood coming through, I'm going to have to clean it all again," Mr Shields said.

"It's going to take a lot of time before

the house is back to what it was before this flood. Honestly, I'm just really sad to see everything destroyed. It's devastating."

Since February, most of the Daly River community have been living in evacuation centres in Darwin and Batchelor.

There have been a lot of problems with accommodation at the evacuation centres. Residents reported feeling like prisoners. They were told when they could and couldn't leave the centres, and made to wear wristbands. They didn't have enough privacy in sleeping areas, and the quality of the food was substandard, including frozen sandwiches. Security guards also treated people roughly, and local residents discriminated against them.

Community organisations, including the Northern Land Council, were banned from entering without NT Government approval.

"I didn't like being in the evacuation centre. We were treated really badly, like we were prisoners or something," Mr Parry said.

At the end of May, residents slowly began going back to the community.

The shop has now been completely refitted. The houses that are safe to return to have been completely cleared, rewired with new electrics, and have new plumbing.

A lot of people are happy to start heading home, but some are worried that the community isn't ready for everyone yet.

The Mayor of Victoria Daly Regional Council (VDRC), Brian Pedwell, said they needed funding to fix buildings

such as the aged care centre, which was currently full of black mould and asbestos.

"How are we meant to deliver our normal services if we can't use our buildings?" Mr Pedwell said.

Green River Aboriginal Corporation CEO Wayne Buckley said he was worried about where the money to fix staff housing was going to come from.

"This is an organisation that runs on delivering government services ... so we don't have the [deep] pockets of money, nor do we have the opportunity

to generate revenue," Mr Buckley told ABC Darwin on 5 June.

Many residents are now calling for more to be done to make sure the community is better prepared next time there is a big flood.

"For starters, we need to have an emergency evacuation centre so that we don't have to always go into Darwin when the community floods," Mr Parry said.

"This might happen again, you know. Maybe we need to think about moving the community up onto higher ground."



NLC Chair Matthew Ryan on a recent visit to Nauiyu, Daly River.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised this article contains the name of an Indigenous person who has died, used with the permission of their family.

Kumanjayi White: Still waiting for answers



Barunga 2025 showing support for Kumanjayi White and his family.

One year after Kumanjayi White died at the Coles Supermarket in Alice Springs, his family and community are still waiting for answers.

ON May 27 last year, 24-year-old Warlpiri man Kumanjayi White died in the Alice Springs Coles supermarket after being held down by two plain-clothes police

officers. For the next 12 months, the community waited patiently while the NT Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) investigated the case.

The DPP is an independent statutory body whose role is to prepare and carry out prosecutions on behalf of the government. While it is not the police, it is part of the Northern Territory justice system.

One year later, the DPP announced

that no charges would be laid against the two officers involved in the incident.

The community in Alice Springs and the surrounding remote communities have been distressed and outraged by the death. In the days that followed, meetings were held at the Coles car park and Warlpiri Elders swept the supermarket before it could reopen. The wounds in the Warlpiri community run deep around deaths in custody, particularly in the wake of the Kumanjayi Walker case.

There has been community outrage following the findings and calls for an independent inquiry.

Aboriginal organisations and community groups are now calling on the NT Government to establish an independent enquiry.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Katie Kiss has renewed her call for justice reform following the findings by the DPP.

"This case yet again highlights the urgent need to ensure that deaths in custody should be independently investigated. Police should not be

investigating other police," she says.

"In the Northern Territory, the police investigate and gather the evidence about a possible crime. The DPP assesses the police evidence. This undermines community confidence and leads to risks of flawed investigations."

Commissioner Kiss said she supports calls for change in the justice sector.

"We support the calls from Aboriginal community leaders and justice advocates for justice sector reform. This case underscores the urgent need for governments to fully implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. 35 years on from the Royal Commission, many of its recommendations remain unimplemented.

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability are especially at risk of harm within policing, justice and corrections systems."

A four-week coronial inquest will be held in April 2027 to investigate the case. The inquest will hear evidence from witnesses, police and experts.

Strong community opposition to changes to child protection laws in NT

Community members, human rights, legal and Aboriginal organisations oppose changes to child protection legislation.

THE proposed changes to the Care and Protection (Every Child Matters) Bill 2026 would make it easier to remove children from families and limit consideration of important factors such as kinship, community and cultural ties.

The Care and Protection of Children Act 2007 has been rewritten and rushed through Parliament following the death of five-year-old Kumanjayi Little Baby in Alice Springs.

On 13 May, Child Protection Minister Robyn Cahill introduced the proposed changes in the NT Parliament. If passed, they would make it easier for children to be removed from their families, weaken kinship and cultural connections and expand the courts' ability to enforce Family Responsibility Agreements.

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 70% of Indigenous children in care in the Northern Territory are placed with non-Indigenous carers, in residential care, or in other arrangements

away from Aboriginal relatives or kin. Only 19% are placed with Aboriginal relatives or kin.

The Bill was referred to the NT Legislative Scrutiny Committee for an inquiry and report. The committee invited public submissions with only six days' notice.

Community members and organisations strongly criticised the lack of consultation and the short time frame.

Despite the limited consultation period, more than 330 organisations, along with community members, legal services, child protection experts, health care and social work practitioners, and Aboriginal leaders made submissions. The Northern Land Council (NLC), together with the other Land Councils, strongly opposed the Bill recommended that it not be passed.

Northern Land Council Chair Matthew Ryan said he was concerned the changes would remove children from families and cultural ties for longer, undermining their right to grow up with family, community and Country.

"These changes are unfounded attacks on culture. NLC has asked Government to meaningful consult

with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal people about any changes and to focus on systemic issues that put children at risk," he says.

"These are attempts to distract from the real drivers and real suffering of Aboriginal people in the NT.

"These changes are taking us backwards, similar to intervention times. It moves away from trauma-informed decision-making and expands control of the government through court orders.

"We want genuine and extensive consultation first, because this is important. It's our children we are talking about."

Earlier in June, the four NT Land Councils met in Barunga and resolved to work with The North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA) to advocate for better kinship care outcomes as a solution to issues in the Child Protection system.

Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT (APO NT), a collective of key Aboriginal organisations, is calling for Aboriginal-led consultation, investment in families, and the Child Placement Principle to remain central to the legislation.

The Aboriginal Child Placement Principle is a national framework designed to protect the cultural rights of Indigenous children in out-of-home care. It was established to help ensure another Stolen Generation never occurs.

A coalition of eight legal services that provide legal assistance to parents and families in child protection matters in the NT also warned against the reforms, saying the Placement Principle exists to prevent another Stolen Generation.

Minister Cahill says child safety must take priority over kinship and cultural ties.

"You cannot use [culture] as an excuse if they [the child] are not safe," she says.

Minister Cahill has been working on the reforms for more than a year, but many critics believe the Government has used the devastating events in Alice Springs to fast-track the Bill through parliament.

The committee handed down its report on the proposed changes on 8 July.

Advocates are concerned the changes could result in another NT Intervention.

Yindjibarndi battle against mining giant



Yindjibarndi Members arriving at the Federal Court building before the determination was delivered, on Tuesday 12 May 2026. Photo credit: Promod Thomas, Juluwarlu Group Aboriginal Corporation.

After a 15-year court battle, Yindjibarndi people have won a historic native title compensation case in the Federal Court against iron ore giant Andrew Forrest's Fortescue.

IN May this year, after 15 long years, the Federal Court awarded the Yindjibarndi Native Title Holders \$150 million in compensation for economic and cultural losses against mining giant Fortescue Metals Group (Fortescue).

The Yindjibarndi people live in the Pilbara region of Western Australia. Their traditional lands are located near the Fortescue River and Hamersley Ranges.

Fortescue has operated on Yindjibarndi lands without a Native Title Agreement for over 13 years.

While the amount of money awarded may seem large, it is significantly less than the \$1.8 billion the Yindjibarndi people were claiming and only a small portion of the wealth FMG have extracted from mining on their lands without consent or agreement.

The Yindjibarndi case is only the third successful compensation case that includes both economic and cultural loss. The other recent compensation decision was for the McArthur River Mine in Borroloola (NT) that was declared earlier this year.

This case, like the McArthur River Mine decision, is important. It shows that the

Australian courts are now willing to put a monetary value on cultural loss as well as economic loss. It is also the first case where a mining company was ordered to pay the compensation instead of the Federal, State or Territory Government.

In a statement on 14 May, Michael Woodley, CEO Yindjibarndi Group, said the damage has been significant to the Yindjibarndi culture, but the compensation shows respect for culture.

"The determination acknowledged significant damage has been done to Yindjibarndi songlines and other areas of cultural heritage, including the complete destruction of 124 Yindjibarndi cultural sites, damage to many other

sites and impacts on ground and surface water systems," he said.

"The Court demonstrated understanding of Yindjibarndi cultural losses, including quoting at length from Uncle Middleton Cheedy and my mother-in-law (Nyidi) on the devastating impact that the mining has had on them."

The Yindjibarndi people are still considering whether or not to appeal the case. In the meantime, they are preparing to start their first renewable energy project, the Jinba solar project, while exploring other economic projects and community development opportunities for their people.

Northern Land Council stands strong on access to Little Finnis River area

The Northern Land Council (NLC) released a statement in June this year reminding the public to stay away from the Little Finnis River and Fog Bay Coastline, following a number of reports of unlawful access beyond the closure line.

THE area was closed by Traditional Owners in 2021 to protect the section of the coastline.

The closure ensures the area is protected and preserved in a sustainable way for the environment, future generations and, most importantly, Aboriginal people who maintain deep cultural connections to these waters.

The closure applies to commercial fishers, recreational fishers, and fishing tour operators.

In 2024, the NLC installed two marine buoys to clearly mark where the Finnis

River enters Aboriginal land. The closure line is approximately five kilometres upstream from the mouth of the Finnis River.

The entirety of the Little Finnis River is within Aboriginal land and waters, which extend to the low tide mark along the Land Trust coastline.

Entering or remaining on Aboriginal land without a permit or licence is a criminal offence under the Aboriginal Land Act 1978 (NT) and the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act.

The NLC has written directly to individuals and groups who continue to unlawfully access Aboriginal land and waters and reiterates that commercial fishers, fishing tour operators and recreational fishers must respect the decision of Traditional Owners.

Up-to-date information on access to the Finnis River and other Sea Country in the NLC's regions is available at nlc.org.au/recreationalfishing.



Fishing buoy marking the start of the Little Finnis River closure line.

McArthur River Mine compensation decision wraps up

In April, more than 100 Native Title Holders came together in Borroloola to hear from the Northern Land Council about the Federal Court's McArthur River Mine compensation decision.

THIS landmark decision awards Yanyuwa, Gudanji and Yanyuwa-Marra Native Title Holders compensation for cultural and economic losses resulting from the construction of the McArthur River Mine in 1993 and its later conversion to an open-cut mine.

Native title holders were given the opportunity to ask questions about the decision and what it will mean for their communities and families.

The decision is one of the biggest compensation awards for impacts on culture and country in Australia.

It marks the end of a decades-long battle fought by Native Title holders who stood up strong for their Country for generations.

The decision sets an important precedent for Native Title Holders who are owed compensation by government or third-party land users right across the country.



Seated, front row (left to right): Ruth Friday, Dinah Norman and Mavis Timothy. Standing, back row (left to right): Hazel Shadforth, Patsy Barrett and Joyce Dirdi.

Traditional Owners stand up against Claravale land clearing



Wagiman Traditional Owners.

Land clearing on Claravale Station and Farm started again in June, despite strong opposition from Wagiman Traditional Owners

WAGIMAN Traditional Owners are taking the Federal Environment Minister to court for failing to listen and consult with Wagiman people around the protection of their country.

Large-scale land clearing began in June on Claravale Station and Farm to make way for cropping.

This was deeply disappointing to Wagiman Traditional Owners – who have not once been consulted by the Federal or Territory Governments.

Even though Traditional Owners have said no to land clearing on Wagiman Country for many years, the Top End Pastoral Company's applications to bulldoze 2,722.7 hectares across Claravale Station and Farm, north of Katherine, were approved in 2025 by the Northern Territory Government.

The area – almost 10 times the size of Sydney's CBD – is home to a number

of threatened species including ghost bats, freshwater sawfish, Gouldian finches and the red goshawk, an endangered bird of prey.

Due to this risk to threatened and endangered species, the proposal to clear 2,722.7 hectares was sent for assessment under Federal environmental laws in December last year.

In its referral application, Top End Pastoral Company described the land clearing as stage two of a three staged clearing project.

In 2021, stage one of the clearing saw the loss of 1,205.97 hectares of native vegetation without consultation.

If stage 3 is to occur, this could see a total of almost 6,000 hectares of savanna cleared.

The Wagiman Traditional Owners have traditional, cultural and historical knowledge of the land proposed to be cleared, and in their capacity as Rangers, care for, hunt, fish and collect flora and fauna on the surrounding country.

Wagiman Traditional Owner, Verona Huddleston, said that she was "very

unhappy" that the clearing had started again.

"We have told them that we don't want this clearing...it was fine before but now I drive through my country and it's all going to be gone," Ms Huddleston said.

Since 2021, the NLC has written a lot of reports on behalf of Wagiman Traditional Owners, asking the NT and Commonwealth Governments to stop land clearing on Claravale Farm and Station to protect native animals and vegetation.

In January this year, on behalf of the Wagiman Traditional Owners the Northern Land Council sent a letter to the Federal Environment Minister Murray Watt inviting him to visit Wagiman Country, to speak with and hear from the Wagiman directly.

Despite their invitation, at no point during Top End Pastoral Company's land clearing application were Traditional Owners consulted by the Northern Territory or Federal Governments on this matter.

In February, Minister Watt decided Top End Pastoral Company's proposal

to clear 2,722.7 hectares of native vegetation would unlikely have a significant impact on threatened species and that assessment under Australia's national environment laws was not necessary.

Ms Huddleston said it was very disappointing no one came to speak to them about the decision.

"It's hurtful that we didn't get any feedback or asked about this. It really hurts."

A major worry for senior Wagiman Traditional Owner, Theresa Banderson, is that nothing will be left for the next generation.

"We have all our young ones coming up, and we need that country there so we can teach them about this country."

"We want our trees there, all our animals, all our kangaroos, porcupines, we want to try stop that, we don't want it knocked down."

On behalf of Wagiman Traditional Owners, the NLC has now launched its own application for the Court to hear the Wagiman people's concerns with the Minister's decision to allow the land clearing to go ahead.

Traditional Owners, permit officers and rangers team up for Cahills Crossing permit blitz

In June, vehicles were checked after crossing Cahills Crossing and entering Aboriginal Land over two days.

WITH the number of people entering Aboriginal land without the right permit increasing in the last 18 months, Traditional Owners, NLC permit officers and the Adjumarllarl and Njanjma Rangers teamed up to check people had the right permits as they got ready to cross the East Alligator River at Cahills Crossing.

During the two-day blitz, 26 vehicles were checked. Of these, only six did not have a permit to enter Aboriginal Land. All vehicles were able to apply for a permit on the spot and continue their trip, and two of the vehicles applied for a permit just so they could cross Cahills Crossing before returning immediately.

Commonwealth and Northern Territory Law states that entry to Aboriginal Land requires a written permit.

The NLC's job is to administer permits in the Top End through consultation with Traditional Owners. Permits are free and ensure that the rights and privacy of Aboriginal communities are upheld,

safeguard the natural environment, and promote safety for visitors.

NT Police are responsible for enforcing the law and prosecuting entering Aboriginal land without a permit. Traditional Owners can also ask visitors for proof of a permit while on their land.

If visitors don't have a permit, they can be refused entry and may also receive a fine.

Njamja Ranger Coordinator Kelvin Gardner said an ongoing issue, especially in West Arnhem, was illegal hunting and poaching.

"There are no hunting permits that individuals can apply for," Mr Gardner said.

"The only way you can hunt on Aboriginal Land is through a registered safari hunting business that has an up-to-date section 19 agreement."

Senior Adjumarllarl Ranger and Traditional Owner Dwight Wauchope said that it was great to get on the ground and educate people about the permit process.

"It's really easy to get a permit, and I think once people know what it's all about they are happy to do the right thing," Mr Wauchope said.

Permits are free and can be applied for online via the NLC website at nlc.org.au/permits.



NLC permit staff at Cahills Crossing.



ILLEGAL ACCESS ON ABORIGINAL LAND

What is illegal access?

- On country without a permit.
- Commercial activity without a Section 19 Agreement.
- Recreational activity without the right permit.
- Sacred site entry and damage.

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131 4444

Email
pact@nlc.org.au

Call the NLC team
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Scan to report

Permits, Agreements &
Compliance Team
(PACT)



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BARUNGA

Barunga Festival 2026 brought families and young people from across NT communities and towns to celebrate Indigenous culture, music and sport. The Festival featured a Battle of the Bands, where bush bands from across the NT competed for the title, as well as sports competitions throughout the whole weekend, including footy on the oval, basketball in the courts and baseball. It's annual MR W. Runyu Art Pavillion was packed with art centres from across the NT, including Numbulwar and Ngukkur Arts.



Culture on display



This year's Barunga Festival continued to keep alive the tradition of sharing cultural practices and sports.

THE Festival offered visitors the opportunity to participate in weaving, spear making and throwing, painting, didgeridoo making and sampling bush foods.

Mimal Rangers had a big fire pit going

where they cooked kangaroo tails and damper. Mimal Land Management staff from Strong Women for Healthy Country Network ran weaving and bush medicine workshops for women.

On Sunday, Mimal Senior Ranger Lydia Lawrence was on the fire, cooking roo tail while Jill Curtis who works with Learning on Country at Bulman, was on the dough for damper.

"It's a good festival. We're having a good time doing culture stuff, teaching



weaving," she explained to Land Rights News.

Later in the day, Lydia joined Mimal team in the bungul afternoon performance.

For men, there were spear and didgeridoo making workshops.

Daniel Blitner has been running the didgeridoo craft workshops for several years at Barunga Festival.

For Daniel, cultural workshops are a way to keep culture alive through tourism and teaching young people.

"The first thing is to keep the culture alive. To try to build the spirit back up for the community and the families," he said.

"Especially bringing it to a festival like this one, it invites other people to come and join in and learn about our culture and what really happened in the early days."

Daniel also teaches students in schools how to make didgeridoos. He loves going to Barunga Festival to run workshops.

"It means the world to me to teach others, spreading the love and the culture."

The spear throwing competition drew a big crowd, with men from all ages having a go at throwing a spear toward a stuffed kangaroo from various distances.

Groote Island man, Sammy Wurrawilya, won the competition by executing a direct hit on the target 35 metres away, winning the crowd over.

Barunga Festival celebrated cultural activities, sharing knowledge and skills with people from diverse backgrounds.

Now and then

Land Rights News has been going strong for over 50 years, and in each edition we try to find a story from our archives that our readers today might be interested in.

These photos show how much the Barunga Festival has stayed true to its origins, with a photo of then NLC Chairman Galarrwuy Yunupingu, winner of the spear-throwing competition in 1990, alongside Sammy Wurrawilya from Groote Eylandt, the winner of the same content in 2026.



Sammy Wurrawilya, winner of the spear-throwing competition at Barunga Festival 2026.



• Northern Land Council Chairman Galarrwuy Yunupingu hurls the winning throw in a contest at this year's Barunga Festival (see full story pages 12-13). Mr Yunupingu has called on the new Aboriginal Affairs Minister to get rid of the dead wood in ATSIC: "ATSIC will only work if you clear up the place, otherwise Aboriginal people will lose interest and just walk away." (See lead story this page).

Out of the Archives: Barunga Festival 1990 in Land Rights News

The following stories are from the June 1990 edition of Land Rights News. In addition to featuring the Barunga Festival, the edition also included stories about deaths in custody, calls for a Treaty, the destruction of sacred sites, and much more. Many of these are the same issues we are still covering in 2026, and shows that, despite the significant land rights and native title gains that have been made over the past fifty years, there is still more work to do.

BARUNGA FESTIVAL — INTO THE '90s

BARUNGA FESTIVAL TO GO INTERNATIONAL

Organisers of the Barunga Sports and Cultural Festival say this year's celebration was the best yet and plans are under way to promote next year's Festival internationally to draw more tourists to the four-day event.

Next year's Festival will have children's athletics events and will centre all sports finals on the main oval with a mobile grandstand to improve vision for spectators. And the Barunga-Wugularr Council has employed a horticulturist to "green up" the town with increased grass growth to make camping and spectating more comfortable.

"There is great interest around the world in Aboriginal culture and we think Barunga is the ideal place for people to see it," says John Kelly, who organised the Festival with Warren Raye and the Barunga community. John's commentary on the loud-speaker kept the 5000 visitors at the Festival continually informed and entertained throughout the event.

"Barunga's not far from Darwin and it's easy to get here so we could hit the jackpot if more tourists visit us," John says.

"I've been to most of the Festivals over the years and 1990 was just the best yet — it'll be even more spectacular next year."



Photos:
• (Top) Four young boys from Dagaragu taking a break from the Festival by Barunga Creek — (l to r) Alister Splendour, Nathan Morris, Daniel Aigy and James Edwards.
• (Right) Santa Theresa football team and their many supporters run a lap of honour after their thrilling victory over Wugularr. Santa Theresa won with a goal kicked after the final siren.
• (Below) Bulman batter Eileen Cummins hits out against the Alekerange softball team.
• (Left) Hundreds of people witnessed Festival highlight: the annual spear throwing competition.



Sports results

FOOTBALL GRAND FINAL
Santa Theresa 7.7 — 49 points
Wugularr 5.14 — 44 points
Best & Fairest: Gavin Spencer, Santa Theresa.

SOFTBALL GRAND FINAL
Tennant Creek — 25 home runs
Bulman — 19 home runs
Best & Fairest: Miriam Dawson, Tennant Creek.

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL
Lajamanu — 25 points
Alekerange — 15 points
Best & Fairest: Lisa Andrews, Katherine Pumas.

MEN'S BASKETBALL
Alekerange — 30 points
Kalkaringi — 29 points
Best & Fairest: Richard Mununggrr, Yirrkala.

SPEAR THROWING
Daniel Yunupingu and Galarwuy Yunupingu of Ski Beach were equal-first in the competition.
Special mention for excellence: Lindsay Joshua from Numbulwar.



Photos:
• (Top) Yirrkala defenders come under pressure from the opposition in one of the preliminary games of the Men's Basketball competition. The competition was finally won by Alekerange.
• Women from Lajamanu dancing Yawulyu on the Sunday evening of the Festival — (l to r) Biddy Napanerigka Walker, Yijaturru Makamarra Nelson, Daisy Napumuria, Liddy Nampinpa and Rosie Napurrula Tasman.







Barunga Battle of the Bands shines a light on bush musical talent

Up-and-coming bush bands from right across the Territory competed for a spot on this year's Barunga Festival main stage.

BANDS hit the stage over two days, competing in a round of heats and finals, before the judges announced the winner.

Ntaria rock and roll legends from Central Australia – Fejo and the Cruisers – took out this year's top spot.

Fejo and the Cruisers played on the main stage to thousands of people. Their prize pack included studio recording sessions, professional photoshoots and a songwriting mentorship.

Traditional Owner and rock music legend, Harold Dalywaters, travelled nearly five hours from Elliot to perform. For him, getting up on stage wasn't about winning the big prize.

"It was great to play to a whole new audience," Mr Dalywaters said.

"I really love playing music and it's a good opportunity to be here with all the families and bands from all the bush communities."

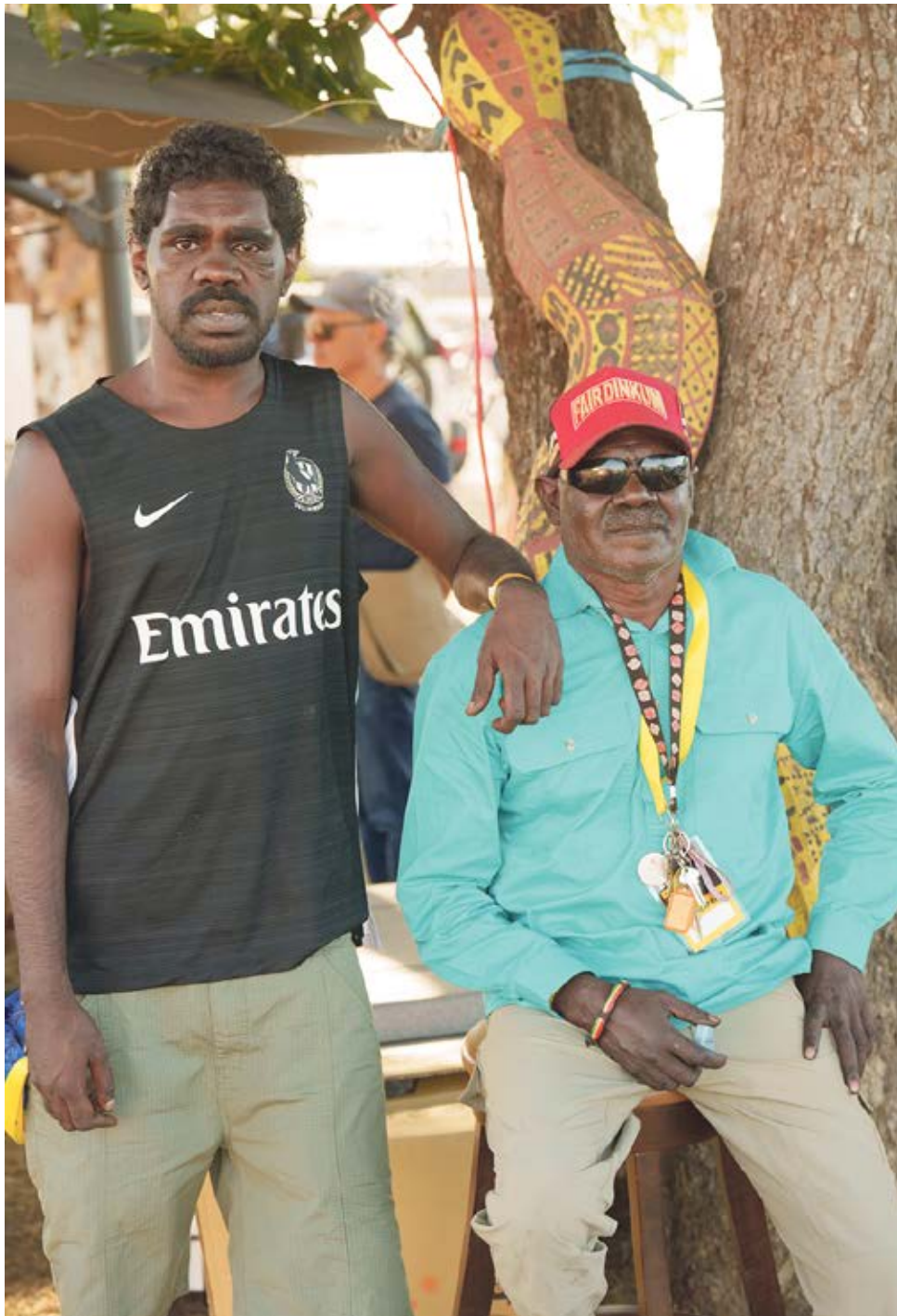
Top End band BNB (Borrooloola and Beswick) practised hard in the weeks leading up to the show.

"We wanted to sound really good, so we knew it was important to practice a lot," lead singer of the band, Nancy, said.

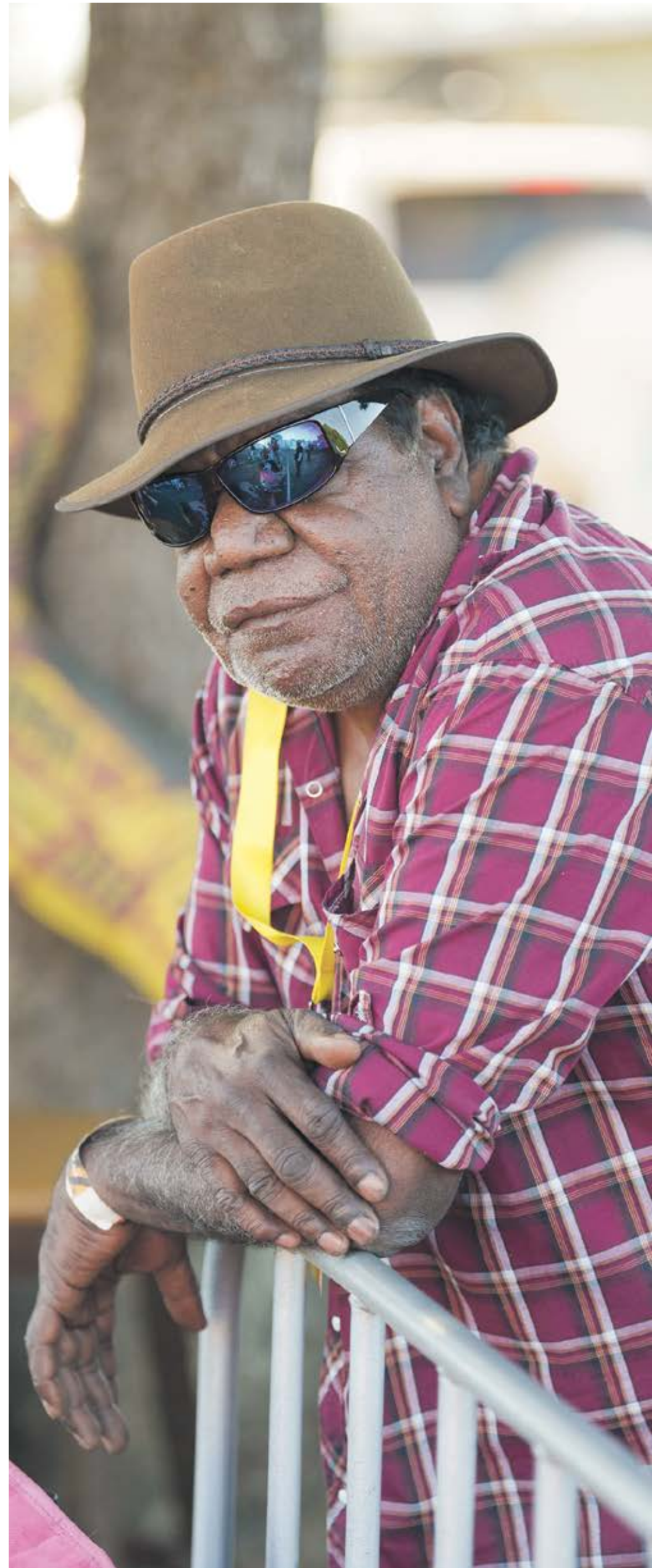
He said playing music was important in his community to try to spread positive messages.

"I love playing music because I can sing about important things in my community to influence people, especially the younger generations," he said.

"Singing about issues like going to school ... staying away from drugs and alcohol."



BNB Band.



Harold Dalywater.

Grand Final glory for Papunya men and Daly River Women at Barunga Festival

This year's Barunga Festival delivered a thrilling competition of community football between teams from across the NT. The Papunya Eagles and the Daly River Buffaloes claiming impressive Grand Final victories.

THE footy oval in Barunga gathered spectators across the entire festival in a display of community spirit, watching the fierce competition between communities from the desert to the islands.

The Papunya Eagles men's team took out the Grand Final against the Gove Stingrays in a hard-fought and exciting match.

In front of an excited crowd, both teams showed an intensity from the opening bounce. The Stingrays put a lot of pressure on the Eagles. But the Eagles found their rhythm, and used speed, teamwork, and clean ball movement to take control.

Their midfield played a key role throughout, winning contests and driving the ball forward, while the forwards focused on scoring. Gove stayed competitive and pushed hard across all quarters, but Papunya held firm to secure the win.

The final siren sparked celebrations as the team claimed a proud victory for their community.

The Gove Stingrays men's and women's teams were strong: they both made it to the Barunga Grand Final.

In the women's competition, the Daly River Buffaloes played an inspiring game: they beat the Gove Stingrays and claimed the Grand Final title.

Both sides competed fiercely. The Gove Stingrays pressured the Buffaloes, but the Buffaloes stayed calm, worked together and took control of the match. They stayed focused and held their lead through to the final siren, though the Stingrays put up a good fight.

Their wins show not only the skill and dedication of the teams, but also reflects the strength, resilience, and pride of their communities. The Daly River Buffaloes had a challenging start to the year, with interruptions to training and their daily lives due to flooding and two evacuations.

The Barunga Festival once again brought together sport, culture, and community, with Papunya and Daly River's triumphs standing out as proud moments of achievement.



Papunya Eagles winner of the men's AFL Grand Final at Barunga Festival 2026.



Women's Daly River Buffaloes playing AFL.



Papunya Eagles player kicks the footy.

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Kenbi Rangers welcome a new boat to the team

The Kenbi Ranger group have launched a new boat to assist with their caring for country activities.

The custom-made boat was officially welcomed to the ranger team

by Kenbi Traditional Owners and community members at a smoking ceremony event at the ranger base in Belyuen in June.

The boat, named Kabal after the Kabal Islands, is purpose-built to travel further and withstand harsh weather conditions.

The purchase of the boat was possible thanks to a Northern Territory Government grant.

Kabal will be used by the rangers to protect sacred Kenbi sites, travel out to Kabul and Bare Sand Islands for sea turtle monitoring, and carry out sea patrols with neighbouring

ranger groups.

The smoking ceremony for the boat was an important part of the community coming together and blessing the new boat, giving it good luck for its voyages ahead.



Kenbi Traditional Owners blessing the new Kenbi Rangers boat, Kabal.

A long journey ends with celebration



Bungul performed at the Mimal IPA celebration.



Penny Ngui, Director, Indigenous Protected Area Program (DCCEEW); John Dalywater, Mimal Chairperson; and Dominic and Nicholls, Mimal CEO.



Kendrick Bush, Mimal Cultural Advisor and Director, with John Dalywater, Mimal Chairperson.

On June 11, Mimal Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) was dedicated at the Mimal ranger base in Weemol, near Bulman about 300 kilometres north-east of Katherine.

THE celebrations started with the Balngarra clan holding a smoking ceremony to welcome newcomers to their country.

This was followed by speeches, including from John Dalywater, Mimal Chairperson.

The agreement declares 17,188 square kilometres in south-central Arnhem Land as Mimal Indigenous Protected Area. It was signed in front of over 100 staff and key stakeholders.

Mimal landowners' vision was to protect country by voluntarily declaring an IPA. They first made an application to the government in 2022. However, COVID hit soon after and the process was delayed. In the following years, over 1000 people from across the region were consulted through workshops and individual meetings.

The new Mimal IPA will be managed by the Dalabon, Rembarrnga, and Mayili peoples of that country, made up of 36 clan groups.

Land Rights News caught up with John Dalywater and Kendrick Bush, Director and Mimal Cultural Adviser, after the signing, to ask what IPA will mean to the region.

Mr Dalywater said the vast area

protected under the IPA will promote strong cultural governance and expand the ranger program through the increased funding.

"Ultimately it means our country is protected under 'whitefella' law," he said.

"Our rangers will be able to better manage feral animals, including buffalo. We will be able to monitor buffalo movements with electronic tagging, that is connected via satellite.

"This allows us to control their location and move them away from waterholes and sacred sites. It also allows us to reduce the amount of damage to country and control the number of buffalos on our country."

Mr Bush, said the IPA would create

new and long-term opportunities for greater employment for young people and for teaching them about their history.

"It will mean jobs, and allow us to celebrate our way of living.

"There will be more telling and recording of historical stories by campfires, and children will have the chance to learn from our old people."

The celebration finished with a music concert with an amazing lineup, including Nabarlek Band and Blekbala Mujik. More than 300 people from communities across the region joined the celebration.

More than a laundry: Building pride and dignity from the ground up

Aboriginal Investment Group's (AIG) Remote Laundries program launched a short documentary about how Remote Laundries are helping people across communities in the Northern Territory.

FILMED in Gunbalanya, the 15-minute documentary captures the stories

behind AIG's Remote Laundries Project and the positive impact it is having in communities across the NT.

The film shares the stories that numbers cannot measure such as improved health outcomes, increased dignity, local employment and the strength of genuine community partnerships.

The documentary was filmed over three days alongside community members, Remote Laundry staff and project partners. The result is an

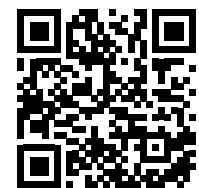
authentic and respectful reflection of what community-led solutions can achieve when people work together.

AIG's Remote Laundries provide free access to washing and drying facilities, helping reduce the spread of preventable skin infections while creating culturally safe spaces that support the health and wellbeing of families.

More importantly, they are designed in partnership with communities to

meet local needs and create lasting opportunities.

We invite everyone to watch More Than a Laundry and learn more about the people, partnerships and purpose behind the Remote Laundries Project.



watch the doco here



Making the short documentary in Gubalanya. Credit: AIG.

AMRRIC can help with:

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**Healthy Animals
Healthy Proud Communities**

Learning and cultural trip to Budjeriki Island

With the arrival of Dharratharra'mirri harvesting season in the Yolngu calendar in Milingimbi, Learning on Country students travelled to Budjeriki Island for a harvesting trip.

BUDJERIKI is one of the remote islands that make up the 12 Crocodile Islands, known to be a Ganguri (wild yam) hotspot. Through the Learning on Country program, students spent two days learning to harvest, hunt, and cook along with elders, teachers and rangers from Milingimbi Outstations and Progress Resources Association (MOPRA).

Around 80 students participated in a harvesting trip, with one day for miyalkurrwurr (girls) and another day for yawirriny (boys).

On the first day, the 40 miyalkurrwurr (girls) who travelled on the barge from Milingimbi were split into different group activities. One group walked through the mangroves looking for Ragudha (mud mussels), Nonda (long bums), and Nyoka (crabs). A second group went digging for yams with three elders, and another group spent time on the beach making damper and tea.

The second day was for the yawirriny (boys). The boys went hunting, digging for yams, making damper and fishing. The boys' day had a different cultural focus. They learned about harvesting Mälawan, which is a mangrove tree used to make spears.

Celine Baker, one of the mothers of the students, said she was happy the children were learning how to find bush foods. She was also happy that some students were teaching others.

"My son told me he was teaching the other kids how to look for crabs. And the girls told me they were learning how to find the vines for the yams and working as a team to find them."

When looking for yams, the children learnt to look out for the big, strong vines growing along the Djambang (tamarind) trees. Ganguri (wild yam) climb up the bigger trees. The leaves grow at the top of the trees so they can absorb sunlight and then the vine sends nutrients down to the tuber under the ground, allowing the tuber to grow into the soft sand.

Elders and rangers also guided students on how to identify seasonal foods and medicines.

Rosetta Wayatja, a Learning on

Country steering committee member and cultural leader in Milingimbi, said teaching children Yolngu knowledge is essential.

"We know when it's the right season for yam after the grass grows tall, and sometime after that it will be ready to be knocked down by rain. We call it Dharratharra. It's what in English they call winter. Winter is telling us the right season to take kids to go any island or mainland, because we know ganguri, yam, is ready.

"The kids have to learn that their first lesson is to feel their feet on the sand. To walk and sweat, because this way they are learning how our ancestors lived and survived."

For Rosetta, teaching students about culture is about showing them about how Yolngu people have always lived and stayed strong. It's important to keep Yolngu knowledge and pass down to the next generations.

"We can find the right leaves and vine for Ganguri. Ganguri is the main food for how people from all over Arnhem land have lived and survived," she said.

"People used to live healthy with that bush tucker from the sea, from the bush. I want my kids to learn the cultural way properly. They need to become a knowledge woman or knowledge man to then go out and teach kids for when they're in an island or anywhere in mainland, they can find the bushtucker in the right season. To know, what is harvesting, what is ready to eat, what is time for hunting. There is a lot of bushtucker – fish, crabs, mud muscles – all good ṛatha (food)."

"The kids are learning a lot. They are excited to be learning on country on the cultural trip to Budjeriki. We bring along elders, cultural advisors. We always encourage and show the kids what is the right bush tucker to be found in the bush. It is yindi djäma (big work), because we need to feed ourselves when we have no ṛatha (food)."

"When they grow up, they need to feed their kids, the next generations. They will keep going until they'll be grandparents. We need to keep teaching them. We need to be strong for the kids."

Learning on Country in Milingimbi teaches more than 120 students throughout the year about cultural learnings, connecting students to their Yolngu ways.



Jennifer Dikarr – cultural advisor digging gungari with her daughter Loretta.



Joy Yurraywuy cultural advisor teaching students.

Language for Land Rights



Rhys Clarke using language resources during a consultation in Ramingining.

In West and East Arnhem land, Traditional Owners attending meetings for mining and exploration proposals on their country, are now hearing parts of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act (NT) in language for the first time.

THE Northern Land Council (NLC) is improving how it runs consultations with Traditional Owners about mining, with the help of linguists. Bininj Kunwok Regional Language & Culture Centre and Aboriginal Interpreter Services (AIS) translated materials used during meetings into Kunwok and Yolŋu Matha.

Consultations about land rights are very complex and can be very difficult to understand even with translators, because the law can use specific words and meanings that are not used in common conversation.

Meetings can be long and involve many clans. The NLC's work is to help Traditional Owners understand what is being asked of their land and ensure that where consent is given, it is done so voluntarily, before anything happens and after understanding all the information clearly.

The NLC Resources and Energy team spent nearly a year developing plain English presentation materials based on years of experience. They asked Traditional Owners what worked well in

meetings and in discussions. Then, they worked with Bininj Kunwok Regional Language & Culture Centre and AIS to translate the materials.

The project was not straightforward. The language centre team - Jeannette Burrunali of Ngalbangardi skin group and Djalama clan group, anthropologist and linguist Dr Claudia Cialone, field officer Andy Peart along with other language workers - worked with NLC to first improve the plain English translations so they made sense in Kunwok.

The translations mean there are now presentation resources in language, along with audio recordings that facilitators can use.

"Doing those translation was a process," explained Dr Cialone.

"We worked with the NLC to simplify the slides, which meant getting to a meeting point between Bininj culture and balanda culture, in the middle."

The next part was more complex. Jeannette and other language workers sat down and translated the simplified text in the slides into Kunwinjku, sometimes explaining difficult concepts and technical terms.

Dr Cialone described the complexity of the concepts and ideas that are communicated in mining consultations.

"People sometimes struggle to understand all the technical terms about what mining does, the financial and technical terms, the cost and consequences of doing mining for years. Because sometimes we are

talking about 30 or 40 years. It's a long time," she said.

Jeanette said it can be difficult for many Traditional Owners and their family members to understand what's being talked about in mining meetings unless there are translations or an interpreter available to help them.

"Our language is the main one in which people can understand. English is sometimes second language, third or fourth, we don't know, but our language is our first language," she said.

"If they wanted to do a consultation, it's really good to have translation in our language, because it's our first language.

"Especially with mining consultations, because mining - it's really hard to understand. So hopefully now some people who didn't understand can now listen and understand in our language."

But for Jeannette, who is a Traditional Owner, this work is about maintaining strong land rights.

To have meetings and consultations in language is, "very important for everybody that's traditional owners in their land," she said.

"Land rights is for the Traditional Owners only. Traditional Owners are the only ones with land rights.

"We understand that in the future, we hand over the land rights to our kids who will be the next Traditional Owners. That land right will be there forever. Our land is our culture, it's like our language.

"We still look out for our land. For

us Bininj people, we always have to be strong to look after our land. Land, language and culture. We have to do this - keep it strong and stand strong for our land rights."

Traditional Owners are often invited to attend meetings to hear proposals from companies wanting to use their country.

As part of their land rights story, they have the option to hear about economic opportunities and make decisions on what they want and how they want things done in their country. It's a story of self-determination and having land rights.

Dr Cialone said that this is very important work that Jeanette and the Language Centre has done to support not just the small community at the Language Centre, but all the Bininj who speak Kunwinjku.

These standardised tools ensure all staff who run meetings, regardless of their background, can use audio recordings in language to explain the consultation process to Traditional Owners.

The presentations are now being used in Kunwinjku and Yolŋu Matha across Arnhem land meetings.

After a three-day consultation with various clan groups, NLC Senior Project Officer Rhys Clarke said the feedback was very positive.

"Given the complexity of the meeting and its topics, it was a great success, and the team has put that down to having translations and information being more understandable in people's primary language," he said.

"All agreed, despite being in many of these meetings in their lives, their understanding of the matters was night and day."

The NLC is now working to have resources translated in Garrwa, Murin Patha and Nungubuyu for Traditional Owners of Borroloola, Wadeye and Numbulwar.



Linguist Jeannette Burrunali, who worked on Kunwok resources.

The community-led university empowering students in the bush

After five years of hard work, Regina Rogers has become the second graduate of the Wuyagiba Bush University pathway, completing her Bachelor of Arts at Macquarie University in Sydney.

SITTING between the remote communities of Ngukurr and Numbulwar, the homeland of Wuyagiba in south-east Arnhem Land is as isolated as it gets.

Despite only being accessible by a rough 4WD track, this tiny community is achieving big things.

It's home to Australia's most remote bush university, the Wuyagiba Study Hub, or Bush Uni.

Set up by Ngukurr Elders in 2018, the Bush Uni gives Aboriginal people in remote Arnhem Land a chance to keep studying without having to travel to city universities.

The Bush Uni is 100 percent community owned by Wuyagiba Bush Hub Aboriginal Corporation, and works in close partnership with Macquarie University in Sydney to deliver courses that contribute towards undergraduate university degrees.

Students learn both ways about bush medicine, kinship, fire management and Indigenous science, and academic, professional and computer skills.

Since 2018, 15 people have finished their courses at the uni and forty students have gone on to enrol at Macquarie University in a range of degrees such as Bachelors of Arts, Business, Education and Environmental Management.

In April, Warndarrang woman Regina Rogers, became the second person to graduate from the Bush Uni, receiving her Bachelor of Arts degree from Macquarie University.

She follows in the footsteps of Mel Warramarrba-Andrews who in 2023 was the first person from Ngukurr to graduate with a Bachelor degree in 36 years.

The now 53-year-old Ms Rogers, said it was her family's legacy, as respected educators, that inspired her to continue studying.

Her parents, Dr K Rogers and Dr Helen Rogers, and her aunty Dr C W Daniels helped set up the Bush Uni in 2018.

"They are my role models," Ms Rogers said.

"I wanted to do this study to help my

people and other communities too, to show people that they can do what I did."

During her degree, she focused on Aboriginal studies, learning about linguistics, community empowerment and cultural practices from other areas.

"I've learnt so many new skills that challenged me. How to research topics using Google Scholar, adding citations and putting a bibliography in alphabetical order were pretty tough, but I'm really glad I know about that now," Ms Rogers explained.

But the road to graduating wasn't always easy for Ms Rogers.

Living thousands of kilometres away from her family and her young son was at times hard.

"I missed my family and my community a lot," she said.

"But my whole community was supporting me. They really wanted me to finish."

In 2023, with one unit left, Ms Rogers paused her studies to care for her sick father, Dr K Rogers. He passed away in 2024.

"I really wish that he was able to see me graduate, but I know he was watching me from above."

Ms Rogers' family travelled to Sydney for her graduation, where they proudly watched her receive her certificate.

Between finishing her units and graduation, Regina returned home to work with Elders on cultural programs, including work with Aboriginal people in prison.

She is now getting ready for the new semester at the Bush Uni, assisting the Cultural Professors and Macquarie University lecturers to deliver the program to a new cohort of students.

"We've just gotta check that the road is okay and then we can start setting up for the new students," she said.

"This year we have students from all over Arnhem Land – Galiwinku, Gapuwiyak and Maningrida."

She added that her dream was for all Aboriginal people to have the chance to come to a university like the Bush Uni, even if it was hard at times.

"Even though I went through a lot of challenges through my study, it's important to remember that your families have your back," she said.

"My message to everyone is that it's important that you commit yourself to do the study. If I can do it, so can you."



Regina Rogers.



Bush Uni students learning on Country.

Catching eyes and hearts



Main actors Cindy Rostron and Denzel Dhurrtyjurrty Marika from the film Manatju.

Yirrkala filmmaker Siena Stubbs takes out top prize at Sydney Film Festival

A young Yolŋu filmmaker from Yirrkala took out one of Australia's most prestigious short film prizes. Siena Mayutu Wumarri Stubbs won the Dendy Live Action Short Award at the 73rd Sydney Film Festival in June for her film *Manutji* (Catching Eyes) - a love story told entirely in Yolŋu Matha.

Ms Stubbs, 24, began her filmmaking journey in 2020 in her home community of Yirrkala, in north-east Arnhem Land, at the Mulka Project. The Mulka Project is a media centre that has a huge collection of archives of Yolŋu knowledge. It also provides training to aspiring Yolŋu film and media makers.

While the rest of the world shut down during COVID, Ms Stubbs practised filmmaking skills and learnt about Yolŋu storytelling.

"The main thing I learnt was to

slow down and listen," she says. "As a teenager, you think you know everything. But you're sort of put back on the bottom of the ladder again."

Ms Stubbs decided to build on what she learned during COVID: she went to Brisbane to study at the Queensland University of Technology. In 2024, she graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Film, Screen and New Media).

Manutji is a love story, but it's a very Yolŋu love story. The title translates literally as "eyes", but it carries a deeper meaning. In Yirrkala, if you point to someone and then touch your closed eye, you are saying "that is my person". The film explores what it means to fall in love in a community where just being seen alone with someone means one thing only.

"In the city, you can go on a first date, hold hands, get ice cream, and no one will blink an eye," Ms Stubbs says. "But in community, the moment you're seen together, the rumour spreads - and you're asked, 'do you

really want to be with that person?'"

Manutji has drawn parallels to *Romeo and Juliet*, but with a different emphasis - focusing not on two people forbidden from being together, but two people allowed by kinship law to be with each other, navigating the weight of how they are perceived by their community. The seed of the story came from Ms Stubbs' own parents. Walking down a hill in Yirrkala together for the first time, her mother leaned over and said to her father: we're married now - just because a family 50 metres away had seen them.

Ms Stubbs was wanted to make the film in a Yolŋu language. Lead actor Cindy Rostron, a rising model from West Arnhem Land, had never acted before and did not speak Yolŋu Matha, but learned her lines and the melody of the language within two weeks.

"It was so important that it was in Yolŋu Matha, because it's for the



Siena Stubbs, director of Manatju.

kids here," Ms Stubbs says. "So they can

watch a movie in their own language and see themselves on the big screen."

She had just one week on country to cast the film, finding her male lead Denzel Marika on her last afternoon. He was running the sports and recreation program at Yirrkala oval.

"You can't quite act like a young Yolŋu person unless you are one," she says.

Siena may have big dreams, but she also knows where the road leads.

"In the end, I'm going to have a house here in Yirrkala and I'll just be another community member. But for the meantime, I'm like the fire going out into the big wide world, letting off the spark - letting our people's voices be heard."

Manutji (Catching Eyes) screened at Sydney Film Festival as part of SBS' Proper Loved Up short film initiative.

Yolŋu artists from Buku Art Centre shine bright on national stage

Distinguished Yolŋu artists from northeast Arnhem land have won prestigious 2026 awards.

TWO Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre artists have been recognised on a national stage as winners of two major art awards.

In May, Sea Rights leader and senior artist Dr Djambawa Marawili AM received the prestigious Red Ochre Award for Lifetime Achievement in Cultural Advocacy and Leadership.

Gaypalani Wanambi, daughter of senior Yolŋu painter and filmmaker Mr Wanambi, makes her mark as winner of the 2026 Wynne Prize for her impressive etched steel artwork about her family's story.

Dr Marawili AM is a senior cultural leader and life-long advocate for Yolŋu culture and Aboriginal rights. He is the last surviving artist of the Barunga Statement, and is known for spearheading the Homeland Movement in North-East Arnhem and the Sea Rights movement in Australia.

In the push for Sea Rights, he painted some of the 80 barks from the Saltwater collection, which were used as evidence in the hearings that led to the landmark 2008 Blue Mud Bay High Court ruling. He has driven art movements, led the new generations of artists and pushed Buku-Larrngay in the spotlight.

Dr Marawili AM has been Chairperson of the Arnhem Northern and Kimberley Artists (ANKA), since 1998. ANKA is the peak body for Arnhem land and Kimberley artists. Dr Marawili AM has been re-elected by his peers every year. He has won many arts prizes, including the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards (NATSIAA) in 2019. He took bark painting to America, in the biggest US tour ever staged.

But back home, his main djäma (work) is being a Djirrikay (senior lawman) of Madarrpa clan. He is a caretaker for the spiritual well-being of his own and other related clans, and an activist and administrator in the interface between non-Aboriginal people and the Yolŋu people of North-East Arnhem Land.

The Ochre Award recognised his outstanding lifetime achievement in cultural advocacy and leadership for a senior Australian First Nations arts leader or arts and cultural worker.

It's not surprising that upon winning the award, Dr Marawili AM sees truth in this recognition.

"I do deserve this!", he said.

It is also no surprise that after winning first prize in the 2025 NATSIAA's last year, Gaypalani Wanambi's artwork secured the 2026 Wynne Prize at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.



Dr Djambawa Marawili AM, winner of the prestigious Red Ochre Award for Lifetime Achievement in Cultural Advocacy and Leadership.



Ms Gaypalani Wanambi and her daughter in front of the award-winning artwork.

Ms Wanambi's winning artwork, The Wanambi tree is about Wuyal, the ancestral honey hunter.

An impressive 2.4 x 2.4 metres, the artwork is spray paint on etched steel.

Wuyal is an important ancestor of the Marrakulu clan, and a descendent of Ms Wanambi.

Wuyal was the first man to look for a homeland for the Marrakulu people. He cut the ancestral Wanambi tree down, causing a river of honey that flowed to the sea, creating the Marrakulu clan homeland at Gurka'wuy.

When she received the new of the award, Ms Wanambi remembered her father.

"My father was a great artist and I learnt by his side. He made bark

paintings, video and metal. He passed away too young and we miss him," she says.

"We are descended from the Honey Spirit Wuyal. He cut the tree at Gurka'wuy and the honey flowed to the sea."

The Wynne Prize, Australia's longest-running art prizes, is awarded every year since 1897 for the best painting or figure sculpture of Australian landscapes.

Wynne Prize finalists are displayed in an exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales until 16 August, 2026.

Land Rights News extends its congratulations to Dr Djambawa Marawili AM and Gaypalani Wanambi on their achievements.

Yarrapay Festival celebrates a decade of music and strength on the birthplace of Land Rights

Hundreds gathered at Yirrkala to celebrate a decade of Yolŋu music and culture during the two-day Yarrapay Festival on 19 and 20 June.

LED by Rirratjingu people from Yirrkala, this year's festival celebrated 10 years of music, culture and strength.

Held on the place where land rights started with the Yirrkala Bark Petition, the festival was created by Wanyubi Marika, the late Reverende M. Marika and Witiyana Marika. The Yarrapay Festival is a showcase of the strength and culture of Yolŋu.

The festival featured footy between the two home sides - Djarrak and Nguykal, a basketball tournament, bungul, a lantern parade and a legendary line up of musical talent from East Arnhem Land.

Friday was a night of fun for *djamarrkuli* (young people), with a dance competition, disco, and good vibes led by dance group Break'n Barriez and up-and-coming Yolŋu artist, Maggie from Galiwin'ku.

On Saturday night, there was a music concert starting with Wild Honey, a new band made up of the next generation of Yothu Yindi band members and home-grown artists including Dhapanbal, Yirrmal and the Andrew Gurruwiwi Band. Feature act, Yothu Yindi closed the night, getting the crowd dancing until late.

There was even an iconic performance by Yolŋu Elvis, performed by Yothu Yindi founder and frontman Witiyana Marika, getting the crowd to boogie.

Witiyana Marika, who held many roles in the festival from being one of the founders to a performer, said the vision was to support young people.

"We decided to make a change in Yirrkala for our young people and put them in the right path to lead a healthy lifestyle, as Yolŋu nation, both Dhuwa and Yirritja."

"We wanted to do something back home. It's more grassroots, where everything started. Yirrkala is where the mission started, Land Rights starts, we had the first Aboriginal principal Dr M. Yunupingu," he said.

Mr Marika said that Yarrapay means 'morning star', and the festival they celebrated "one star - morning start - one light, one life".

"And that rainbow is shared all across the land," he said.



Witiyana Marika got the crowd dancing with Yolŋu Elvis at Yarrapay Festival. Credit: Aris and Grimes.

In recognition of 50 years of Land Rights, at Yarrapay Festival the community also celebrated their heroes.

"We also celebrated our heroes who fought - my father Roy Marika, Milirrpum, Mathaman, and the other Rirratjingu brothers - and the two moieties, Dhuwa and Yirritja."

Mr Witiyana Marika hopes Yarrapay Festival grows bigger and bigger, and they will welcome all people.



Saturday night crowd at Yarrapay Festival. Credit: Aris and Grimes.

Barunga Sports wrap up

Barunga Festival is well known for its high-stakes sports competitions. This year, teams travelled from across the Northern Territory to compete with neighbouring communities, distant communities, friends and family.

THERE were incredible athletic performances, community spirit, and historic victories across AFL and softball.

Regional powerhouses from the Central Desert, Big Rivers, and Arnhem Land regions dominated the podium. Big crowds came to watch the amazing talent throughout the weekend.

Players came from Wadeye and Daly River in the west; Gove and Milingimbi in north-east Arnhem Land; Maningrida in West Arnhem Land; Ngukurr and Bulman in southern Arnhem Land; all the way from Borroloola in the south-east; and from Kalkarindji, Lajamanu and Papunya in the south-west desert regions.

The Men's AFL competition had the largest number of teams competing, with 14 teams coming to Barunga.

The Gove Stingrays began strong, beating NORFORCE in the first match of the competition 19-1. The crowd were on the edge of their seats for the second round, with two draws in games between neighbouring communities. Maningrida and Milingimbi teams tied at 13 points each, and Bagala Crocs and

Ngukurr Bulldogs tied at 15 points each.

Between the desert communities, the Gurindji Eagles beat the Warlpiri Mozzies 31-16. In the next game, the Gurindji Eagles tried to gain ground against the Papunya Eagles. But Papunya kept scoring, and won the game 25-12.

The Papunya Eagles won the prestigious Barunga Festival footy men's title after a tough competition; they beat the Gove Stingrays with a final score of 51-25.

In the Women's AFL Premiership, the Daly River Buffaloes won the tournament with an historic effort. They brought glory back to the Daly River region with an amazing show of skill and teamwork.

Even though they lost the first game

to the Warlpiri Mozzies, the Buffaloes won every other game they played, including the Grand Final against Gove Stingrays.

In the softball tournament, nobody could beat Papunya in any of the rounds. They went on to win the Grand Final, defeating the Borroloola Crocs 11-1.

The double-championship win of Papunya across both AFL and softball is a huge milestone for the community.

The 2026 Barunga Festival sports competition filled the oval with emotions. It also showed how the festival has become an important place for finding new NT sporting talent, not to mention community spirit.



Gove Stingray women playing the Daly River Buffaloes in the Barunga Festival AFL competition.



Norforce take on Gove Stingray on the AFL oval.



NGALYOD (Rainbow Serpent)

and

KULUBAN (bats)

In this edition, we feature an artwork by Joe Guymala from Injalak Arts in Gunbalanya.

Joe is a well-known senior artist and finalist in the 2026 Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards (NATSIAA).

ABOUT THE ARTWORK

The artist has painted Ngalyod, the Rainbow Serpent. Ngalyod is regarded as a most important ancestor spirit in West Arnhem Land and appears in various manifestations in Kunwinjku mythology. In the Dreamtime, she assumed a range of animal forms, including snake, kangaroo and crocodile, and at times transformed herself from one to another, or into a combination of each. It is believed that, as a serpent, she tunnels underground using barbed extensions from her head and the bony protuberance from

her neck as aids. It is believed that Ngalyod dwells in various billabongs in Arnhem Land today, sometimes swallowing bininj (the Kunwinjku term for Aboriginal people) as punishment when they break traditional laws. Ngalyod is painted by many Kunwinjku artists according to each artist's own imagination and mythological background. She is often depicted with the leaves of the mandem (water lily) protruding from her back. The hatching technique used for the in-fill of the body is called rarrk. We eat two kinds of bats. We eat the black flying fox ("Murru") and another

flying fox we call "Nakayalak", which is brown in colour. The old people used go into the big monsoon forests and throw sticks at them. Nowadays, we shoot them with rifles made by balanda (non-Aboriginal people). We don't eat bats that live in caves, including the small bat we call "Malambibbi" and the ghost bat ("Bumabuma"). Ngalyod the Rainbow Serpent is said to be the keeper of the Kuluban (bats). When bats fly overhead at night, this is Ngalyod journeying through country. When no bats are seen, they are hiding in the belly of Ngalyod.



ARTIST JOE GUYMALA	
Homeland/ Country	Manmoyi
Clan	Burdoh
Social Affiliations	Duwa (moiety) Nabulanj (subsection)
Region	Gunbalanya, Western Arnhem Land, NT

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Joe Guymala lives and works in Gunbalanya. He frequently spends time at Manmoyi, his outstation in Western Arnhem Land, and is the grandson of Namerredje (John) Guymala. He has toured nationally

as a musician with Nabarlek Band and Mimih Band and has helped to write many songs, drawing on his knowledge of traditional stories and country. Mr Guymala's creative heritage typically features didactic depictions

of game animals and spiritual figures. He augments these forms into amorphous abstract shapes, with a focus on showcasing internal organs in the region's iconic x-ray style. In Mr Guymala's more abstract works, only features such as eyes hint at the

subjects' figurative origins, employing rich texture and significant scale. His unique ability to balance tradition and innovation positions him as a vital contributor to the evolution of cross-cultural and creative expression within Australia.