

LAND RIGHTS NEWS

NORTHERN EDITION



NORTHERN
LAND COUNCIL

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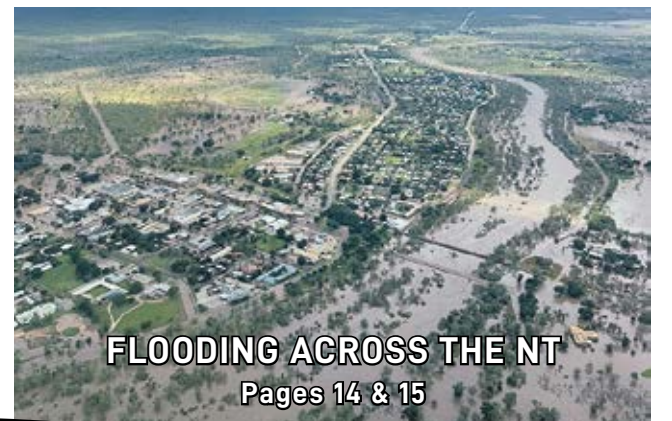
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AUSTRALIA'S OLDEST ABORIGINAL NEWSPAPER SINCE 1973

● EDITORIAL

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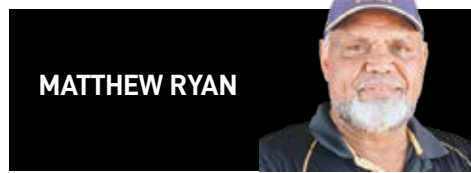


Margaret Guwankil, a Dhipirri Ranger, is one of the many Aboriginal women across the Top End working to make change for their people, their country and their culture. Behind Margaret stands Jordina Garrawurra with her father Blake Djarrbili.

● DISCLAIMER

Please note that this newspaper may contain images of deceased persons. At the time of publishing, any such images are used only with the consent of the deceased's family

A word from the NLC Chairperson, Matthew Ryan



WELCOME to the March 2026 edition of *Land Rights News* - an edition that celebrates the lives, livelihoods and proud history of Aboriginal women in the Top End.

There has been a lot happening in our region since the year began, and I have been busy, very busy, speaking up about issues that affect my people.

In February, I travelled to Wadeye to listen to community members and hear how anti-social behaviour is affecting the community. What I saw in Wadeye was a lot of good people, people who want to see their community settled and prosperous – not troubled by arguments and violence.

A situation, like what is happening in Wadeye, doesn't come from nothing. People are frustrated and disempowered. I have called on Minister Steve Edgington to visit this community: listen to the community members, listen to their ideas about how to move forward.

The coverage of some of the incidents of community violence by mainstream media and on social media feeds into negative stereotypes about Aboriginal people – and we must work to challenge and change this.

Across the Top End, community members have been affected by flooding and cyclones: whether it was time spent in evacuation centres, or remaining at home and having to deal with food shortages and isolation, I acknowledge that my countrymen have been going through a tough time.

The Northern Land Council (NLC) has called on both the federal and territory governments to review their emergency programs and coordination. Let us learn from the mistakes made this year and make sure we don't make them again next year. Aboriginal people need to be at the table when decisions are being made that will impact the safety of our communities into the future.

In March, the new NLC Women's Committee met. This group is made up of women from different generations and from across our seven regions. It is heartening that NLC women are able to contribute as equals to discussions and decisions on issues that affect them and their families across the Top End. The number and background of women on the Council bodes well for our future.

Finally, I would like to talk about the appointment of David Connolly as the NT Administrator.

We stood – with a broad range of

Territory groups and leaders – against this appointment. Our concerns were not listened to. The decision to appoint someone with a history of racist commentary, and who does not represent all Territorians, is incredibly disappointing.

Mr Connolly maintains he can change. He says he is sorry for the comments he made about Aboriginal people and women on social media. But let us wait and see.

We have a busy year ahead year and I look forward to leading the NLC as we work hard to improve the lives of Aboriginal people in the Top End.



Chair Matthew Ryan at protest against appointment of David Connolly as NT Administrator.



Chair Matthew Ryan speaking at a community meeting in Wadeye.



Chair Matthew Ryan visiting evacuees in Katherine.



Chair Matthew Ryan stands beside other Territory leaders in opposition to the appointment of the NT Administrator.

Lorraine Jones: Newly elected NLC Deputy Chair



In December, Lorraine Jones became the second woman to ever be elected Deputy Chair for the Northern Land Council.

Ms Jones is a Traditional Owner of Ngaliwurru/Nungali heritage, from Timber Creek. She is a community leader, cross-cultural trainer and strong advocate for women's safety and protection against domestic violence.

Ms Jones holds a number of other positions, including Deputy Chair of the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority (AAPA), board member of NT Heritage, and member of the Bradshaw Liaison Committee. She is also on the board of the Bradshaw and Timber Creek Contracting and Resource Company.

Ms Jones shared her story of how she came to be involved in the NLC, what motivates her, and what is important to her as a woman leader.

NLC Deputy Chair Lorraine Jones, waiting on the Victoria Highway for the road to open to Timber Creek, during the flooding in Katherine.

How it all began

At first, I wasn't involved with the Land Council. I was an observer. I was invited to a women's conference run by the Northern Land Council. I listened, took it in, and thought about it. But then I had another career with the Northern Territory Police Force for 16 years.

During the Bradshaw Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA), when it was being signed off, Elders began to recognise my cultural authority as a young person. I also realised I could be a voice for people in community – to interpret Western ideas for Countrymen. This was really important to me, because we know that Countrymen can say "yes" to anything they don't understand.

Not long after, I had more involvement in native title and the compensation claim for Timber Creek. In recent years, I was involved with land rights in my Country. I always had that thought: "I want to advocate for my people".

I want to have a voice. I'm especially passionate about

Indigenous women taking on leadership roles and I'm encouraging young women to follow in the footsteps of Ms Yarmirr, the first Deputy Chair of the NLC.

Now that I'm in the seat talking to the current young women on the Council, some of them have aspirations to become leaders and show that young women need to be part of the conversation about issues that affect them.

We have women's sacred sites as well. And I think with me being there as Deputy Chair, then women council members have someone to come to talk to about sensitive cultural matters.

In our seven regions, we all have cultural heritage, archaeological sites and things that sometimes no one looks at. We take pride in what we have in our country, and we want to protect it for good reason, for our generation to come.

As Council members, we represent the seven regions, all wanting protection of our rights and, especially, our sacred sites

that are important to us.

My role is to listen. I'm listening to the concerns that the communities have.

My priority for my region, Timber Creek, is to support people living in homelands. There is very little assistance for them.

My other priority is flooding. That is a big issue for areas that can be affected by cyclone. For example, we have regular flooding, and every time we get flooded, we get evacuated. We don't have a proper shelter. Instead of evacuating our people into town, it would be better if we had our own facility in our community, and then we wouldn't have to leave our community. We would just get supplies sent in.

At the moment, Nitjpurru gets flooded every year. And all that water from Nitjpurru comes down to Timber Creek, and the smaller communities and homelands in Timber Creek get flooded. And then you've got to find shelter. But there is no shelter. Community members who are evacuated have to find shelter and ask family that live up

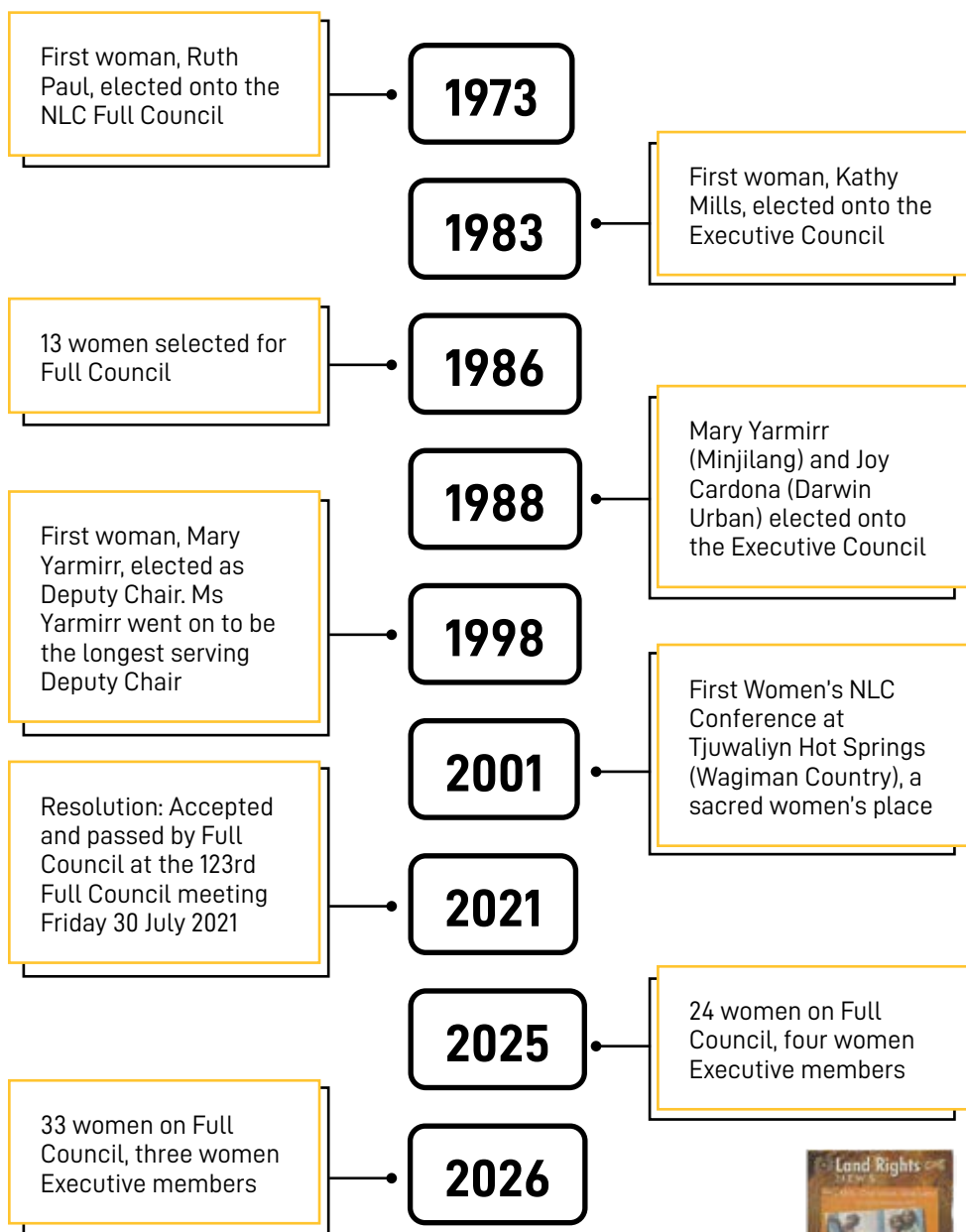
on higher ground in Timber Creek. They have to bunk down with other people, or at the school. Sometimes you can't get the whole community together in one shelter. You have to try and separate people. It's just too much. We don't have big facilities in Timber Creek.

Living and growing up in a community, I know the suffering that we have in our community.

I want to advocate for better housing, promote education and fight domestic violence. Whatever issues women have, whatever issue they want to fix in the community, they can talk to me or to their Council member. We need to know what their needs are. Let's set up resources, bring resources from town into community, so community people don't have to travel all the way into major centres. We need solutions that work for them.

I'm not just a voice for my people. I'm also a voice to advocate for all seven regions.

History



Women standing strong: the Women's Committee

THE Northern Land Council (NLC) has a proud tradition of leadership by strong women. Living proof of this is the NLC's Women's Committee. The committee is a place for Council women from all the seven regions to come together to speak about the issues that matter most to their families and communities. Together, they speak up, find solutions and take those solutions to NLC's Full Council meetings. In 2026, the committee had the biggest cohort of women sitting on Council ever, with 13 women returning as Council members and 20 women as first time members. The committee's work is focusing on Section 19 agreements, Aboriginal Land Rights Act (ALRA) and native title. But it also takes on other issues such as domestic violence, housing, gambling, alcohol and other drugs and school attendance.



NLC Women's Committee, with Chief Minister Lia Finocchiaro at centre.

An historic first meeting

In February, the new Women's Committee held its first meeting for 2026, with 25 women coming together from all over the regions to meet at the new NLC headquarters in Berrimah. Northern Territory Chief Minister Lia Finocchiaro MLA and Minister Robyn Cahill MLA both attended.

It was an opportunity for the committee members to question both Chief Minister Finocchiaro and Minister Cahill directly about issues affecting their communities. They asked about disaster response and flood preparedness, along with food prices, remote road maintenance, and future plans by the NT Government to address family and domestic violence.

Committee Chair Joy Cardona was happy with the outcome of the meeting. "It was really good that the Chief Minister and Minister Cahill made time in their busy schedules to come see us. It will be good to work with them more in the future," she told Land Rights News.

Growing the next generation of leaders

With a large number of new and younger women on the committee in 2026, one of the committee's most important goals is to grow the next generation of women leaders. With every member skilled in their own area of expertise – including childcare, policing, education or health – a big part of the committee's role is to help each woman grow further in these fields, to find their voice and not be afraid to speak up.

"We need to grow them," said Ms Cardona.

"Every one of them has got their own expertise inside them."

Ms Cardona is also determined to build on that expertise, and is working with NLC's Council services to bring in outside experts and to empower the women with greater knowledge of Section 19, ALRA and native title. The committee is also excited to work more collaboratively with their male colleagues on the NLC Council, and will be making sure that women's voices are heard. For Ms Cardona, this means advocating for women to be on more NLC subcommittees and making sure that men understand and respect the women's roles as leaders.

"From our point of view, we are not their wives. We are leaders in our community."

Out of the Archives

From page 6 of Land Rights News, Volume 3, No. 8 December 2001



First victory in the battle for the seas

The traditional owners of the seas around Croker Island off the Northern Territory, bolstered by the High Court's recognition that native title exists on sea country, have called on all Australian governments to recognise and protect the extent of those rights in law for all Indigenous people.

They also want the destructive Native Title Act amendments of 1998 to be reversed.

The High Court handed down its final decision in October in the Croker Seas native title test case, which was the first native title sea claim in Australia when it was lodged in 1994.

While the Mabo native title decision related to land, it did not deal with the question of rights to sea, and the Croker case has been dubbed "The Mabo of the Seas."

For Indigenous people, the connection to land does not stop at the water's edge.

This fact is well accepted in other parts of the world. Rights to offshore areas is nothing new and has been recognised in England, for instance, for hundreds of years.

Principal claimant in the case, Mary Yarmirr, said the decision "confirms what we have always known: our law and our rights extend out to the seas."

"The Commonwealth Government's ridiculous and hurtful argument that our law stops at the water's edge has been overturned forever."

However, Ms Yarmirr said they were disappointed that the High Court had not yet fully understood the extent of native title rights to the seas.

"Australian law is still blind to the reality of our law, but we will use this decision as a platform to fight for greater and

stronger recognition," she said.

The native title claimants had wanted exclusive and commercial rights - recognition that they own their sea country and should have a strong say over what happens.

They also hoped that the court would recognise that they have commercial rights, just as they did with the Macassans, who traded with them until the start of last century.

"When it came to land rights, Aboriginal people fought for recognition of those rights for many years before they were finally recognised by the High Court.

"Our sea rights have now been recognised to a limited extent and the next step is to establish the full extent of those traditional interests to manage our traditional resources," she said.

"We are very heartened by the dissenting judgement of Justice Michael Kirby who stated that our sea rights are as strong as the rights found in the Mabo case. He called on all governments to legislate to recognise and protect the extent of those rights and we agree."

"All Governments must now come to the table with a view to fully recognising our rights and reversing the majority decision by legislation."

"The destructive Native Title Act amendments of 1998 must also now be reversed in the light of this decision."



Top (from left): John Christopherson, Mary Yarmirr and Sam Namaruka
Middle: Croker claimants
Left: Mary Yarmirr

A tribute to Mary Yarmirr – mother of Sea Rights



Signing of Nabarlek lease in 1988 with NLC Chair Galarrwuy Yunupingu, NLC Executive Member Mary Yarmirr (signing), and NLC Executive Member Joy Cardona, and Queensland Mines Limited.



First NLC Deputy Chair Mary Yarmirr.

Mary Yarmirr was elected as the first female Deputy Chair of the Northern Land Council in 1998. It took almost 30 years for a second woman to be elected to this role.

IN this edition of the Land Rights News, we pay tribute to Mary Yarmirr, and acknowledge her legacy and her fight for her people's Land and Sea rights.

Mary Magulagi Yarmirr was a respected Aboriginal leader, educator, and Land and Sea Rights advocate from Minjilang (Croker Island), north of West Arnhem. She belonged to the Mandilarri clan, and her clan totem was the parrotfish, reflecting her deep cultural and spiritual connection to Sea Country.

She was the second eldest of eight children. Her sister Daisy was the eldest. They were four girls and four boys. Her father and siblings are all Traditional Owners of Minjilang.

Ms Yarmirr worked as a preschool teacher at Kormilda College in the mid-1960s, then moved to Minjilang, where she continued to work. She later returned to Darwin working at Ludmilla Primary School. Ms Yarmirr played

an important role in early childhood education within her community: by teaching young children, she helped pass down culture, language, and identity to the next generations, laying strong foundations for learning and community wellbeing.

She married Sammy Namuralka and had seven children: three girls and four boys.

Ms Yarmirr was a leader in her community. She was a director of the Arnhem Land Progress Association (ALPA), making sure community priorities were heard and respected. She was a strong and trusted voice for the corporation and for Minjilang. Her leadership was grounded in service, compassion, and a deep connection to her community and Country.

Her family remembers her as a fighter and a strong advocate for her community.

Mary's youngest daughter, Jennifer Yarmirr, said, "She really did what was best for the community".

"She was a strong leader for the community."

Later, Ms Yarmirr served as Deputy Mayor of the West Arnhem Shire, where she was deeply committed to strengthening local communities.

In the 1980s, Ms Yarmirr joined the NLC, representing Minjilang.

Ms Yarmirr began advocating for

native title recognition over the sea and seabed around Croker Island in the 1990s. Her strong advocacy for the Croker Island Native Title case was the start of the future of Sea Rights in Australia. The Croker Island case was the first time native title rights of the sea and seabed were recognised.

Respect for Ms Yarmirr's work was recognised when she became the first woman to be elected as the Deputy Chair of the NLC. She was a pioneer, daring to challenge previously unquestioned ideas, and she spoke up for the views of Aboriginal women and children.

Joy Cardona is the current chairperson of the NLC Women's Committee. Ms Cardona remembers Ms Yarmirr standing up to the then Chairperson Dr Galarrwuy Yunupingu on the issue of promised wives.

Ms Cardona remembers her as a trailblazer, fighting for Aboriginal rights, and rights for all women.

"She was passionate about what she believed in – in her culture – and she fought the white man's law to win, not just for her, but for all women," said Ms Cardona.

Ms Cardona was inspired by Ms Yarmirr, who pushed for NLC Women's Committee to continue and grow.

"She wanted the Women's Council – that's why I keep pushing this Women's

[Committee], because she wanted it to happen."

In her community, Ms Yarmirr also started a creche and advocated for Croker Island to have a ranger group. She was an educator and interpreter, and worked in Law and Justice in cultural law. She voiced concerns of her community throughout her life, across the various leadership roles she held.

Above all, Ms Yarmirr left an important legacy in the Croker Island Native Title case, which has paved the way for Sea Rights.

Ms Mary Yarmirr was a woman who stood firm at a time when few Aboriginal women were visible. Her strength and willingness to speak for her community show the resilience that has shaped the NLC's history, spanning decades of struggle, progress, and cultural resurgence.

As the NLC continues evolving, Ms Yarmirr's story remains a powerful reminder of the importance of women's leadership. Her courage paved the way for future generations of Aboriginal women to step into governance roles, to speak for Country, and to carry forward the fight for rights, recognition, and justice.

Strong Aboriginal women have always led with courage, and this moment reminds us that their voices continue to shape our future.

Spotlight on new female council members

We spoke to two new female council members who have joined the Northern Land Council for the first time representing their communities. Rhoda Dhurrkay represents Galiwinku Homelands in East Arnhem, while Deanna Kennedy represents Wugularr (Beswick) in Katherine.

Q&A

Rhoda Golung Dhurrkay

Rhoda Golung Dhurrkay is a new Northern Land Council (NLC) member for Galiwin'ku Homelands. She is an Elder in her community.

Ms Dhurrkay is a kinship support (*gurrutu*) worker for Galiwin'ku Women's Space and works for ARDS Aboriginal Corporation, running training in Nhulunbuy and Darwin. She is also a board member for the Northern Territory Aboriginal Advisory Board on Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence.



Member for Galiwin'ku Homelands Rhoda Golung Dhurrkay.

Q. What is it like being a woman in this leadership space?

In our leadership space, as a woman, we want to be representing our *lore*. When we are representing our lore that means elements in Aboriginal culture: *yirralka* (land), *gurrutumirr mala* (family), *bäpurru* (ceremony), and *dhäruk* (language). These are the five interconnected elements of Indigenous culture that we need to use, because when we are going somewhere else, we carry our governance within our inner being. When we are in the Council, we need to think about all these elements, so that, when we are talking, we can make sure we are talking the right way.

We grew up with our *gurrutu* (kinship), but our governance is already in us.

We are here as Northern Land Council women, surrounded by strong women leaders, because we have to talk for our rights. What are our rights? For women, we are talking about how we can show ourselves – who we are – for the future generation. We also talk on behalf of our culture that has been here for a long time. We need to start teaching our children, generation to generation, so they can see and accept what we are teaching them, both ways.

Q. Have you faced any challenges as a leader?

In my peacemaker role, I have some challenges. Sometimes when I work with men and women in domestic family violence, sometimes there is a challenge being in the middle. I don't want to just talk on behalf of one – I have to talk for both of them – because there is a *gurrutu* (kinship) within us. My role as peacemaker is to help people on both sides of the family. I support both the man and woman to bring that relationship back to its foundation, so they can learn from each other, understand each other and so they can see what is difficult and what is not difficult for them.

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

If they want to be a leader, we need to teach them about the Songlines; that are maps across the rivers, land and sky. We need to teach them about the family in us; that family are all connected by *gurrutu*. Kinship is the system of interconnectedness, and family is our main priority. We have to look after ourselves as a family.

We are all Yolŋu, but we have different roles and responsibilities, and we have different clans. When you are standing in front of the old people, make sure you just talk to that point, follow the

process and don't cross the border of talking for other clans, otherwise you are putting yourself at risk.

Q. What inspired you to step into this leadership role in the NLC?

I wanted to be in this role as a member of the Northern Land Council, because I know the land and the sea across north-east Arnhem land. I know which community or which homelands are there. I know the Songlines and I know the *bungul* dancing. I know the Yolŋu ways of understanding the Yolŋu role. And I know the wailing that reminds you to go back to your land, back to your homeland – following the Songlines – wherever the song starts, that's where you follow.

Also, it helps me understand. I feel like I'm passionate and learn from the Elders' past. I am listening, experiencing and collecting information – to build that knowledge and to learn about the vision. Because the old people see the dreams and the young people see the vision.

As Yolŋu, we sometimes feel and observe what is happening in our life. Balanda (white people) only use the rule book, but Yolŋu approach one another with love and peace. And we have intuition.

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

My grandmother, my mother and my adopted grandmother inspired me to follow in their footprints. You need to follow this footprint. Don't abandon your own people in your own community. Turn around and see that you are Yolŋu person, and that's your family out there. Don't just go abandoning them and then forget them. When Balanda came, the five phases of oppression came: exploitation, marginalisation, cultural imperialism, powerlessness and violence. These five phases changed people's life, but it doesn't change our law. Balanda law changes every year, but our law doesn't change – it's still the same. And that law is peace and love.

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

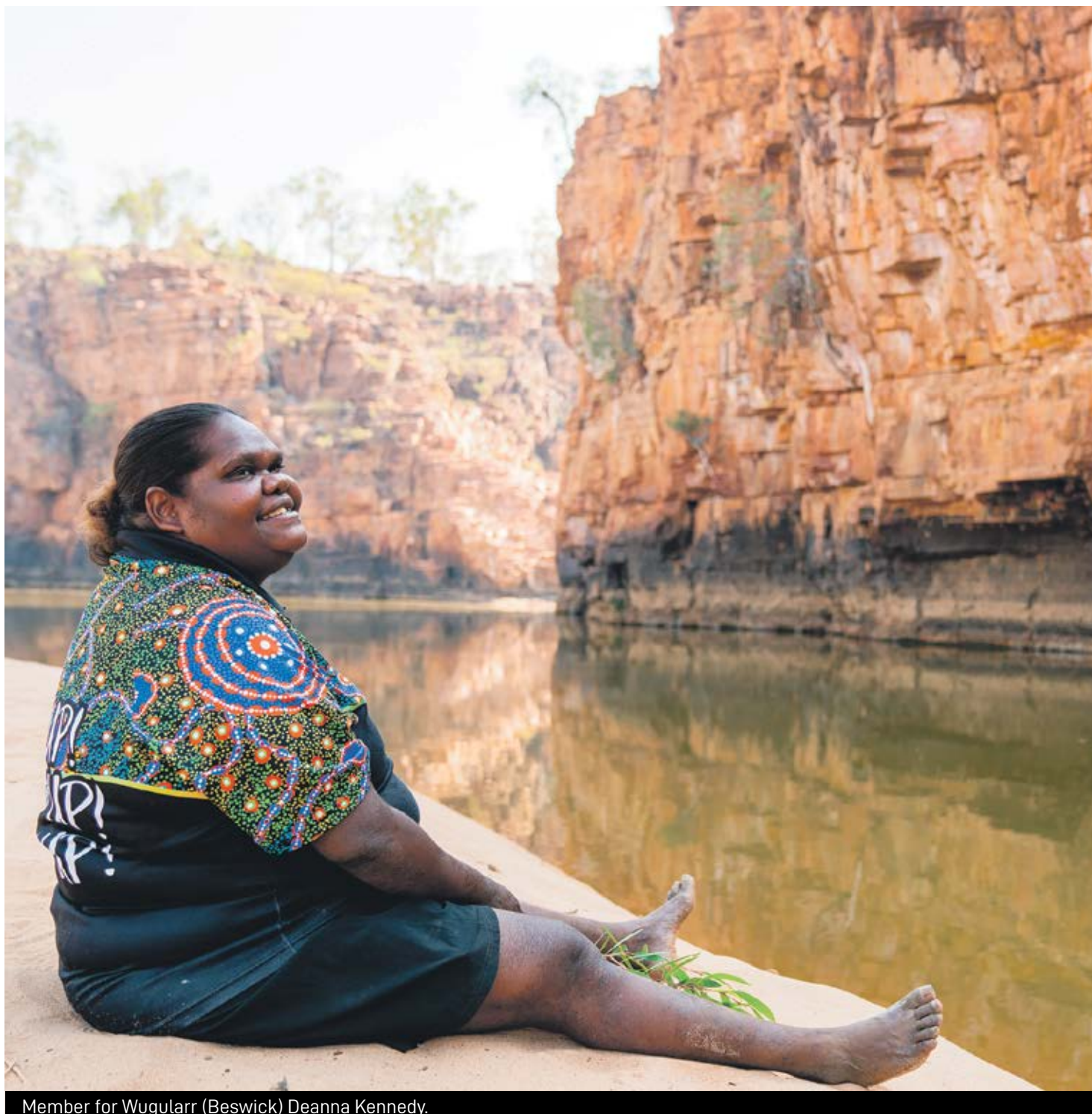
The legacy I need to leave for young people is to follow and be proud of the people that have worked hard and to follow in their steps to reach their goal. Instead of sitting down there, you need to bring your energy and rise up – and not be ashamed to talk. Be brave when you are talking in front of people, show yourself in the image of the person that left us and who is within you. That's what I'm using now – a legacy of my father's footprint.

I have to stand; I am the peacemaker. I talk front, I talk face, and I talk straight.

Q&A

Deanna Kennedy

Deanna Kennedy is in a Northern Land Council (NLC) member for Wugularr (Beswick). She is a Community Aboriginal Liaison Officer of the Roper Gulf Regional Council. She is a director at Sunrise Health Board, sits on the Bagala Aboriginal Corporation Law and Justice Committee and works with the Northern Territory Department of Corrections as part of the Elders visiting program. She was nominated as the Deputy Chair for the NLC Women's Committee.



Member for Wugularr (Beswick) Deanna Kennedy.

Q. What is it like being a woman in this leadership space?

Being a woman, you have different responsibilities. Being on the Council, it gives you that opportunity to talk up; not just about the community itself, but about stuff that women usually don't have the opportunity to talk

about. Being on the Council gives you that opportunity to bring up issues that are affecting the areas you live in. Now that we've come into Darwin for the first NLC Women's Committee meeting, it gives us that opportunity to showcase what women can do.

You have leaders and Elders who

are way older than you, and you have to respect them. Respect goes both ways. Respect is earned, not given. Having young people in leadership roles, it gives the older ones that feeling that they can pass on the knowledge and learn from us as well. It's a two-way learning.

Q. Have you faced any challenges as a leader?

There are challenges that we face on a daily basis by being a woman, but that also gives us that strength and ability to overcome challenges. You get people in communities that look up to you and always want to come talk to you for advice. Or they just want to come and have a chat to you, because they know you are there not just for yourself: they know you are there to help the community.

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

It's tough being a woman, especially a young one. If you have the ability to show that you can do things, I encourage you to take the opportunity and take what's been thrown at you. You have people, especially Elders and leaders in the community, who you can look up to. If you want advice from them, they are there to support you as well and lead you. The Elders and the leaders are always there to encourage young ones to take that next step ahead, because the young ones are the future generations.

Q. What inspired you to step into this leadership role in the NLC?

I was encouraged by the Traditional Owner groups in the community to be on the Council. They needed someone who would speak up for the community, not just for themselves. To them, I had the ability to be on the Council, not to represent myself or my family, but the whole community.

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

That would be my mum, my aunts, my grandmothers. They all passed away, but they were leaders in the community in their own ways. You can always be like them, but you can live from your own perspective and experience. That's the path I'm following: I want to be a leader, but in my own way.

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

Education is always the key. If you go to school, finish up your education, you can be whatever you set your mind to be. It will lead to you going through that path. But then again, you don't know where your leadership journey will take off, and you might be focused on one direction, but end up in another.

It's always good to see young people as role models in the community. If you see the kids at school, they will see that you're leading the way and they will say, "Oh, we want to be like her". It gives them the idea that it is possible for you to do whatever you want.

Women rangers shine bright at North Australia Savanna Fire Forum



Attendees and speakers from the Savanna Fire Forum Youth Yarning Circle. Photo courtesy of the Indigenous Carbon Industry Network Ltd.

The annual North Australia Savanna Fire Forum, in February, brought together rangers, policy makers and Traditional Owners from around Australia to share knowledge and discuss issues in Indigenous land management.

HOSTED by the Indigenous Carbon Industries Network, the two-day event attracted over 500 people.

Participants attended workshops

and talks from over 30 Aboriginal organisations on everything from the role of women rangers, fire management programs, the latest technology, carbon

projects, and Aboriginal leadership.

The forum also welcomed a helicopter on-site, an electric motorbike competition, a music session led by rangers, art sessions led by Danella Lee and two on-country experiences.

What is savanna fire management?

Using traditional Aboriginal burning practices developed over thousands of years, savanna fire management is unique to the Northern Territory.

With savannas in the NT prone to large late-season fires that produce lots of carbon emissions, rangers instead light smaller, controlled fires throughout the season.

Smaller, frequent burning earlier in the season means less big, out of control fires later in the year when the weather is really hot and dry.

Women to the front

A highlight of this year's event was the Indigenous Women Stepping Up presentation.

Featuring six women rangers from the Strong Women for Healthy Country network, the presentation covered everything from cool burning practices to training, the strength of women ranger coordinators and managing work and family commitments.

Strong Women for Healthy Country member and panellist Sheila White said it was a great opportunity to get up and speak in front of people who might not normally hear their stories.

"There's heaps of different organisations at this forum... employers, coordinators, and supervisors that can hear us talking up strong for women in the conservation management space," Ms White said.

"It's important that we talk about the challenges we face working in this space, but also that we share the good stories and telling the stories of the country."

On day two of the forum, Wardaman Indigenous Protected Area assistant coordinator, Acacia Lewis, presented in the Youth Yarning Circle, where she shared her story of being a woman ranger, and fulfilling her dream of working on her grandmother's Country.

"I feel like I'm fulfilling my dream and my role as a Wardaman woman in this job," Ms Lewis said.

"I have faced a lot of challenges in my life, but I'm really grateful that I just kept pushing through.

"We just gotta keep being strong for country and for family."

Warddeken Daluk Rangers take their skills to the skies



Ecological Monitoring Manager Dr Cara Penton with Daluk rangers Seraphina Watson and Dorita Djorolom.

Seraphina Watson is one of the first female drone pilots for Manmoyi outstation Warddeken Daluk (women) Rangers.

THE *daluk* ranger group is based in Manmoyi outstation, almost 200 kilometres east of Oenpelli. Four women hold the title of *daluk* drone pilots for

the Warddeken Daluk Rangers.

Seraphina Watson was the first Warddeken Daluk ranger to complete drone studies and get a Certificate III in Aviation (Remote Pilot) at Charles Darwin University in 2024. In 2025, together with Alexandria Namarnyilk, Cammie Wood and Lorina Maralngurra, she got a Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) Remote Pilot Licence. This means they can operate large drones for work or commercially.

Now, the women play a key role in delivering site surveys digitally, by using drone technology and being a technical authority for other rangers.

Ms Watson said she supports the rangers and community to safely operate small drones on Country.

"I often show some of the *daluk* and our coordinator how to fly the drone," she said.

She has become someone other *daluk* rangers look up to and can learn from.

"I'm proud of myself that I got a drone license. If any other *daluk* rangers want to use a drone, they can come and ask me, and I can show them how to use the drone.

"Younger women, and even old people, are interested in using the drone. They come and ask me – 'let's go, show us how to use the drone'," she said.

Drones are helping the Warddeken Rangers in Manmoyi do site surveys. They can find damaged tracks from pigs and measure the size of the damage. The drone can survey the land digitally by taking pictures and videos of damage made by pigs and other feral animals.

Then, the *bininj* (men) rangers have to set the traps, and the *daluk* rangers go and check the traps.

Ms Watson said that the drone also helps the rangers with fire management.

"Sometimes we use a drone to see where the fire is burning. It's easier to track fires from the drone," she said.

"Then we make a break around that fire."

Ms Watson has completed digital badges of using camera traps, doing site surveys and other survey skills.

Warddeken Land Management is made up of Traditional Owners of the Warddeken Indigenous Protected Area (IPA). They operate out of three remote bases in West Arnhem:

Kabulwarnamy, Mamadawerre and Manmoyi. The rangers combine traditional ecological knowledge with western science and tools to manage and protect almost 1400,000 hectares of stone and gorge country.

The Warddeken IPA is owned and managed by the Traditional Owners of 36 different clan groups, with about 130 Aboriginal rangers caring for Country every year.

Warddeken Rangers work on a variety of projects including fire management, weed and feral animal control, rock art conservation, education and cultural heritage management.

Having rangers with drone skills, like Ms Watson, means they can see land in less time, instead of driving and walking on Country for hours.

The rangers using drones show the younger generation and other *daluk* rangers how they can use technology to care for Country. Sometimes Ms Watson takes the drone on bush trips with the kids, so they can take a video or photos and see the landscape in a different way.

Women leading the way



Elmara Campion, Belinda Wanagagi, Narelle Bonson (with mask) and Jodie Lee Nalabeer getting ready for a work trip.



Marcia Malibirr holding up a yam.



Mali Djarrbal, Senior Miyalk Ranger, holding leaves used for smoking ceremonies.

Across Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women play important roles in protecting nature and cultural heritage. Caring for country is important, demanding work, and women rangers need to be involved and share that responsibility.

ABORIGINAL women rangers have walked many miles to step up into ranger roles. Often these jobs are dominated by men, but in the last decade, that has changed. There are more than twice as many women doing ranger work. The strategy to make a stronger women's ranger program has been key to the successes on country.

In the last edition of *Land Rights*

News, we celebrated the newly dedicated Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) for Arafura Swamp. On the front page of this edition we have Margaret Guwankil, a Dhipirri ranger. Though she walks by herself in this picture, she isn't a lone ranger.

Many women have joined their local ranger groups and have been encouraged to get more involved in

caring for country. Arafura Swamp Rangers Aboriginal Corporation (ASRAC) is made up of different ranger teams and has increased the number of women rangers: over a third of its ranger staff are now women. These rangers look after an area of 13,273 square kilometres of country, including 336 square kilometres of sea country.

Land Rights News spoke to some ASRAC women about being rangers, and the challenges that come with the job. Working on country isn't easy, but these women are out there leading the way.

Mali Djarrbal, Senior Miyalk Ranger, is a long-serving ranger, with 12 years out on country with ASRAC. She is a great example to the youth and the women who will follow in her footsteps.

"We need to make sure that there are equal jobs for women rangers and men, and more of a balance between saltwater and freshwater rangers.

"We walk together from this side to the other side, and it's good to be a ranger. I'm here to support all these new rangers, even the other generation coming up. I'm here.

"The job is good for me to work on, sometimes it's too hot but I always fight, I fight for myself, I don't wanna

stay behind from this job because I love this job, I care. This is my job to teach them and show them, and it gives me more courage to my life, how I feel."

Florence Birdjala has also been a ranger for 12 years. In that time, the ranger program has grown and shifted with the needs of country. She is proud to be a ranger for country and for her family.

"Healing country is very special. I look at the rangers' job as a good one, it's good work to look after our country and its important for our sacred sites.

"Sometimes I'm scared of buffalo and snakes, but I'm still always spraying the weeds and keeping an eye out for them. And the spiders and scorpions."

Challenges come in different ways for each ranger, but one of the biggest for Marcia Malibirr is the environment.

"Working in the heat is hard," she said. She explained that it was her biggest challenge as a ranger, but as temperatures rise in the region, the women rise to the challenge.

As we look ahead to the future generations, we must remember to look back at who was walking before us. And there's no better footsteps to follow than the rangers out on country.

'It's important to keep fighting' McArthur River Mine decision marks important moment for Native Title

Following more than a decade of advocacy and court action by Gudanji, Yanyuwa and Yanyuwa-Marra peoples, the Federal Court decision on compensation marks an important milestone for Native Title Holders.

GUDANJI Traditional Owner Chris Pluto is the second generation of his family to stand up against the damage the McArthur River Mine has done to his Country.

Standing outside the Darwin Supreme Court with his son and a number of Gudanji, Yanyuwa and Yanyuwa-Marra Traditional Owners, Mr Pluto explained: "This is my father's country that I am fighting for. He fought before me and I fight not for myself, but for all Gudanji people."

The decision handed down by the Federal Court has been a long time coming.

First filed by the Northern Land Council on behalf of Gudanji, Yanyuwa and Yanyuwa-Marra Native Title



Chris Pluto, Justin Pluto, Jack Green, Josie Davey, Mavis Beth outside the Supreme Court Building in Darwin.

Holders in December 2020, the case argued that establishing the McArthur River Mine in 1992 and the expansion of the mine in 2007 caused significant cultural, spiritual, economic and environmental damage to Country – damage that is still there today.

In 2023, the case went to trial in an on-country hearing and in the Federal Court in Darwin.

A number of Traditional Owner witnesses gave evidence of the damage to their Native Title rights caused by the McArthur River project.

Almost six years on, this long-awaited decision is a result of hard-fought advocacy by the Gudanji, Yanyuwa and Yanyuwa-Marra peoples.

Justice Katrina Banks Smith said in her judgement that the damage was "intergenerational and enduring". She awarded the Traditional Owners \$54 million for non-economic or cultural losses, and \$743,408 for economic loss, plus interest, to be paid by the Northern Territory government.

The decision is the largest compensation award for impacts to

culture and Country in Australia.

It will make a difference to other Native Title Holders who are owed compensation right across the country.

Gudanji Traditional Owner Josie Davey said, "It makes me feel proud that this outcome might help other mob across the country with their fight. It's important to keep fighting.

"For years we have been repeating ourselves and fighting. Our Country is just getting damaged and will continue to be damaged."

Kewulyi people protect sacred site from mining

KEWULYI people in the Roper River region have successfully protected a culturally significant area from a mining expansion on Namul Namul pastoral lease.

A decision by the National Native Title Tribunal from a Future Act Determination Arbitration about a mineral lease application

on Namul Namul pastoral lease, saw the Kewulyi group protect their culture and land.

Evidence before the Tribunal highlighted the cultural and spiritual importance of areas within and surrounding the ilmenite mine, and showed that mining activities would disrupt,

damage or disturb culturally sensitive areas.

While the Tribunal determined that part of the mineral lease may be granted, it said no mining could happen close to an important sacred site on Kewulyi country. The Tribunal's decision recognises the real risk

of cultural and spiritual harm and affirms Kewulyi people's native title rights to protect places of cultural significance.

Wak Wak solar farm

TOTAL Energies H2 (TE H2) is a French renewable energy company that has been planning to build a solar energy farm – the Wak Wak Solar Farm – in the outer areas of Darwin. The Wulna people are the Traditional Owners for the land,

although there is no native title yet.

Late last year, TE H2 submitted a non-claimant application over the project area. The non-claimant application tries to show that there is no native title over the

project area.

The NLC and Wulna group immediately and strongly opposed the non-claimant application.

TE H2 have since withdrawn the non-claimant application and talks are scheduled between TE H2

and the Wulna group to negotiate a land use agreement about the planned project. The NLC will continue to work with the Wulna group and protect their rights as Traditional Owners.

Legal bites

Native Title Holders fight to protect Country on Lorella Springs



Burdal Riley, Murrungun, Wunubari and Mambali Walangara Native Title Holders outside the Supreme Court Building in Darwin.

Last December, a group of Burdal Riley, Murrungun Wunubari and Mambali Walangara Native Title Holders who live in Ngukurr, Numbulwar and Borroloola gathered at the Federal Court in Darwin to challenge a non-pastoral use permit and water licence that had been granted to Lorella Springs Station.

FOR decades, Lorella Springs Station has operated a tourism business, known as Lorella Springs Wilderness Park. The park operated without the required government approvals and without proper consultation with, or permission from, the Native Title Holders. Popular tourist attractions in the park hold deep cultural and spiritual significance for Native Title Holders, who have long advocated for the protection of their Country.

In 2022, after continued pressure from the Northern Land Council on behalf of the Native Title Holders, the pastoralist for Lorella Springs finally applied for a non-pastoral use permit to operate the Lorella Springs Wilderness Park. The pastoralist also applied to the Water Controller for a water licence for Rosie Creek.

At an NT Pastoral Land Board (PLB) hearing in March last year, the Native Title Holders spoke about their concerns that past and proposed tourism interferes with sites of cultural and spiritual

significance. They asked that the permit not be issued without an Indigenous Land Use Agreement in place.

On 31 March 2025, despite the strong advocacy of the Native Title Holders, the PLB granted the pastoralist a non-pastoral use permit to continue tourism activities. The pastoralist, however, had to abide by certain conditions, which delayed the reopening of the park.

The Water Controller also granted the pastoralist a water licence for the tourism business. It allows the pastoralist to take water from Rosie Creek, a waterway connected to multiple sacred sites, at a rate 17 times more than was applied for.

Following these decisions, the NLC, on behalf of Native Title Holders, started legal proceedings in the Federal Court to challenge the granting of the non-pastoral use permit and water licence.

Last December, Native Title Holders travelled to Darwin for the Federal Court hearing, where the NLC legal team again argued the Native Title

Holders' position.

The granting of the permit and water licence were challenged on many grounds, but significantly that any tourism involving Aboriginal cultural works or activities requires an Indigenous Land Use Agreement.

After the hearing, Native Title Holders called for greater respect, justice and genuine consultation throughout the Northern Territory government's decision-making processes of issuing permits and licences.

Native Title Holder Rex Isaac said that meaningful engagement with Native Title Holders is essential.

"If he (the station owner) wants to build a relationship with the Traditional Owners, he needs to come down and talk to us about the area he wants tourists to go on," Mr Isaac said.

Grace Daniels, a Native Title Holder from Ngukurr, suggested that the station owner should do things the "right way" and get permission from Traditional Owners.

"Then come back and talk to Traditional Owners, who will give him a yes or a no. He should have done that, instead of what he did, going over our heads for more support," Ms Daniels said.

"We are afraid of tourists going onto our sacred sites without permission: they have already damaged some of the sites, trespassing and painting over our old paintings."

NLC Chair Matthew Ryan said this case was an important example of Traditional Owners standing up to preserve their Country.

"Protecting sacred sites is important, and tourism operators must respect Native Title Holders if they say they have done the wrong thing," Chair Ryan said.

"I applaud the strength of these Native Title Holders and the fight they have put up to protect their traditions and culture."

The outcome of the Federal Court case will not be known for some time.

Stories and voices from the Top End floods and cyclones

Over the last few months, communities across the Top End have been hit with some of the worst floods in decades and two cyclones. We take a look at what it's been like for some of the impacted people and communities.

Numbulwar

AT the end of March, a late-season category four cyclone made its way across the coast of Queensland and to the Top End.

With the cyclone predicted to hit the remote coastal community of Numbulwar head on, and no cyclone shelter in the community, all 500 residents were evacuated to Darwin.

The day of the evacuation was a long and confusing one for Numbulwar resident Clive Nunggarrgalu.

"I woke up at 5am to pack everything

up and get the family ready to go to Darwin," Mr Nunggarrgalu said.

"But then we had to wait for hours and hours until we actually left. There was a lot of confusion and no one was telling us anything.

"People were starting to get pretty angry and worried."

Most emergency evacuation centres across Darwin were already full with people from Daly River and Palumpa communities, so the 500 Numbulwar residents were taken to the Nightcliff Middle School gymnasium.

Some residents, including Mr

Nunggarrgalu and his family, chose to stay in private accommodation.

He said the people staying in the evacuation centre were finding it really hard.

"My sister is staying at the centre and it's really crowded. It's not really what we are used to," he said.

"I think it's important to have some privacy when you sleep. Us Aboriginal people have respect ... we can't be near wrong family."

While Mr Nunggarrgalu is happy the community is safe from the cyclone, he would rather not have to come all

the way to Darwin.

"I just wish that we were able to stay a bit nearer to home and not be brought all the way to Darwin," he explained.

"I'm feeling really worried about getting all the family back safely to Numbulwar when this is all over. I don't want people getting in trouble here and getting caught up in bad things.

"I also am sad for my Country. Who knows what it's going to look like when we get back."

Daly River (Naiyu)

SINCE February, Naiyu residents have been evacuated to the Darwin showgrounds twice. They will soon move again, to Batchelor, until they can go home.

In March, flood levels in Naiyu reached a record height of 16.26 metres, with video footage showing only the roofs of houses above the water level.

With no emergency centre or shelter on higher ground in the area, there is no way for people from Naiyu to stay

on their Country.

Although Naiyu resident James Parry has lived through many floods over the years, he said they never get easier to deal with.

"It's really frightening," Mr Parry said.

"We just tried to pack up as much of the house as we could ... but you can't take everything."

As well as missing their homes and worrying about the damage the flood has done to their community, many have concerns about the level of care

in the evacuation centre.

These include a lack of privacy in the sleeping areas, uncomfortable camp stretchers, rough treatment from security guards and bad food.

Some of the people evacuated also said they experienced a lot of racism from people in Darwin when they went on buses or to shopping centres.

"A lot of people here don't even wanna go to the shops or get on the buses, because they are worried about how people will treat them," Mr Parry said.

"It's really stressful for us being in Darwin away from our homes and it's even worse if we don't feel like we are welcome in town.

"It makes me sad. I just want to be able to go home as soon as it's safe. Start rebuilding, you know."

While still at the evacuation centre in Darwin, Mr Parry said he hoped "Batchelor will be better."

"Hopefully we'll have better food, better beds – no more sleeping on stretchers without mattresses, and maybe even pillows", he said.

Katherine

IN March, Katherine faced its biggest flood since 1998, impacting thousands of people in the town and surrounding communities.

Over 400 people stayed at evacuation centres in the town.

Northern Land Council (NLC) Chair Matthew Ryan and Deputy Chair

Lorraine Jones visited the evacuation centres. They heard about how people were managing the impact of flooding on their homes and communities.

Many people said there was different quality of care across different evacuation centres.

"Some people are sleeping on stretchers with no mattresses, while

others have mattresses. Last night, people didn't get dinner till 10pm," Chair Ryan explained.

Since the flooding began, some communities have become eligible for disaster relief payments from the Northern Territory and Commonwealth Governments.

But many have missed out.

Bulman resident Spencer Martin, who was visiting family in Katherine, said he can't get any disaster relief payments as his community was not yet eligible for payments.

Mr Martin, and many other evacuees from surrounding communities, have no idea when they will be able to return home, or if they will get support.

Wugularr

THERE have also been major floods in Wugularr, an hour out of Katherine. Police moved people living in houses closest to higher ground.

Wugularr resident and NLC Council Member Khalia Bush said, without a proper emergency centre in the community, all impacted people had to stay with family or at the school.

"We already have issues of

overcrowding in Wugularr, and this has put a lot of extra pressure on everyone," Ms Bush explained.

"And for everything else, we have to use the school. The clinic has to operate out of there, families are in there, and the council is using the kitchen to cook food for the aged care residents.

"It means there's been no actual school for our kids for at least two

weeks."

Another issue for Wugularr is food security.

Because of the flooding, the community is cut off from main roads. The shop ran out of fresh food and meat within a couple of days.

The community has waited over two weeks for a delivery of fresh food, coordinated by the local Aboriginal corporation.

"I was really worried," Ms Bush said.

"We just didn't know what was going to happen. No one was telling us anything and there was a lot of uncertainty."

She wants better communication for future disasters.

"I wanna see better communication from the government mob. People are still sleeping at the school and don't know what's gonna happen," she said.

Disaster planning: Listen to our people

A record season of floods and cyclones across the Top End has shown how vulnerable remote communities are when disaster hits. Aboriginal communities are calling for change.

HISTORIC levels of flooding and the late-season threat of a tropical cyclone has impacted remote communities right across the Top End.

Emergency services work hard to make sure everyone is safe, but communities have been evacuated multiple times. There has also been inconsistent care in the evacuation centres and serious concerns around food security.

For a number of years, community leaders and the Northern Land Council have said they are not happy with how natural disasters are handled in remote communities. They have advocated strongly about what needs to change.

In March, the NLC wrote to both the territory and the federal governments calling for the following changes:

- Build evacuation centres close to communities.
- Talk to Traditional Owners, community leaders and Aboriginal people before, during and after an emergency.
- Make sure evacuation centres are culturally safe.
- Make sure the food, bedding and services are good before people move into the evacuation centres.
- Tell people about upcoming emergencies early, so that Traditional Owners and community members can make informed decisions about evacuating and can do other things to stay safe.

NLC Chair Matthew Ryan said governments needed to listen and act.

"This work can't wait until another wet season hits," Chair Ryan said.

"Both levels of government need to start talking to Aboriginal people and figure out a better way forward."



Numbulwar community being evacuated. Photo courtesy of ADF.



Daly River Elder, James Parry.



NLC Chair Matthew Ryan speaks to a community member at the evacuation centre in Katherine.



Evacuees from Daly River arrive at Darwin Showground. Photo courtesy of AAP.



Residents and community members line up for Emergency Relief payments in Katherine during the recent flooding.

Daly River



Photo courtesy of AAP.



Photo courtesy of AAP.



Katherine

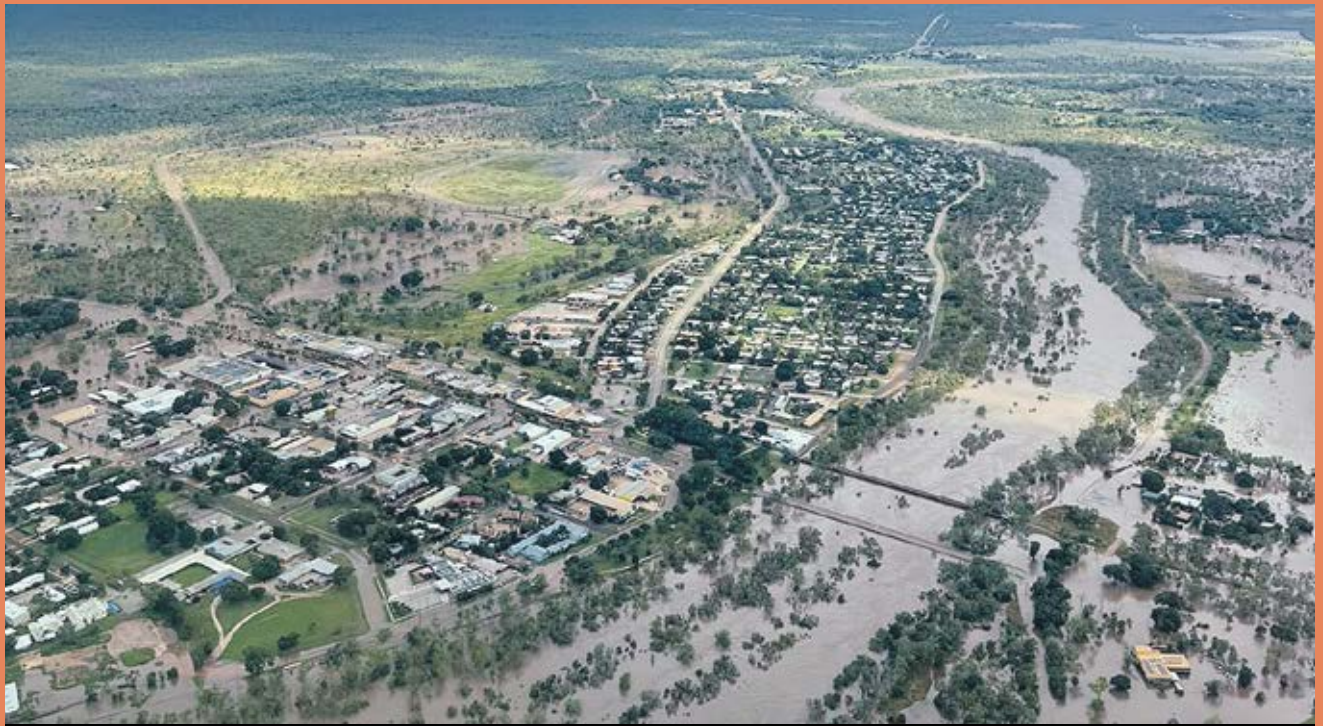


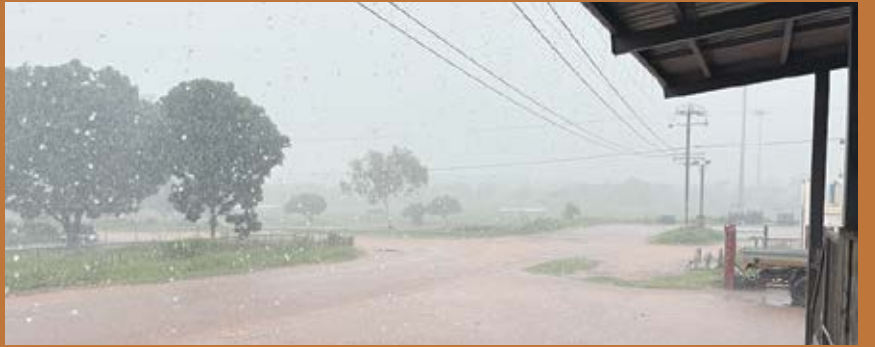
Photo courtesy of AAP.



Ngukurr



Photo courtesy of Roper Bar Park and Store.



Minyerri



COMMUNITY IMPACT AND INNOVATION GRANTS

Aboriginal Investment NT's **Community Impact and Innovation Grants** give access to apply for between \$300,000 and \$1 million to support medium-scale Aboriginal community-led projects in the Northern Territory.

The Community Impact and Innovation Grants are designed to **support projects** that **achieve cultural, social, and/or economic impact or innovation.**

To learn more about the Grants or to apply, visit www.aboriginalinvestment.org.au/community-impact-and-innovation-grants

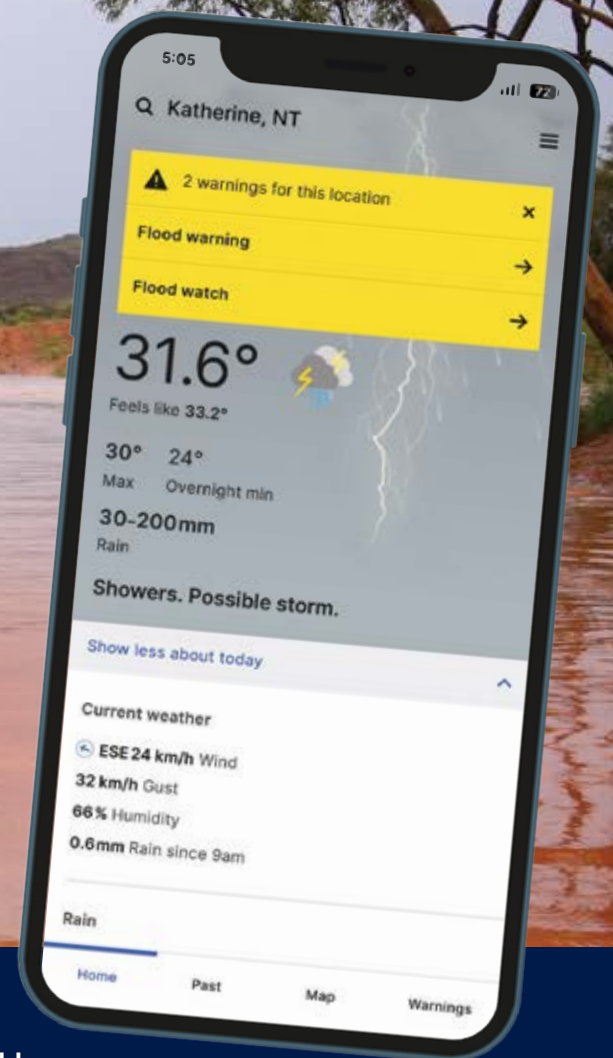
Applications must be submitted before the 30th of April.



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Wadeye Sea Farmers celebrate first commercial mud crab sale

Wadeye's newest seafood business celebrated a major win last December, bringing its first-ever commercial haul of mud crabs to the Darwin Fish Markets. Supported by the Aboriginal Sea Company (ASC) and Thamarrurr Development Corporation (TDC), the group sold out their first batch in record time.

FOR the Wadeye Sea Farmers and Traditional Owners, the moment marked the beginning of a long-awaited chance to earn income from seafood farming on country.

It took years of planning, training, and overcoming logistical barriers — such as limited transport, high export costs, and lack of harvesting infrastructure — to get to this point. Now, this new community led commercial fishing venture has the potential to create jobs, training pathways and intergenerational pride.

For Traditional Owner Mark Tunmuck-Smith, the project is deeply connected to culture and country.

"Having a business like this has long been a dream of ours. We feel very connected to this — to the sea and the crab and the barramundi," Mr Tunmuck-Smith told Land Rights News. "It's also a goal of ours to give our young people the ability to achieve something in the future for themselves."

The crabs are harvested from the western side of Docherty Island, and their successful arrival in Darwin — despite difficult weather, transport hurdles, and the delicate task of keeping the crabs alive — has got the Wadeye community excited about what comes next.

According to ASC Operations Manager Kylie Fadelli, the Wadeye group is blazing a trail for other communities, and this first sale is just the beginning.

"The flow-on opportunities from this are huge," Ms Fadelli told Land Rights News. "There's also plans for a community-run seafood shop and lots of interest from other communities to run similar ventures as well."

With the first successful sale done, Wadeye Sea Farmers are poised for growth in 2026 and beyond —and inspiring other coastal communities to follow their lead.



Wadeye sea farmers and Traditional owners Mark Tunmuck Smith, Theodore Dooling and Uriah Crocombe.



The first haul of mud crabs.

Funding boost keeps ghost nets fight alive



Numbulwar Numburindi Rangers retrieving a ghost net from the beach.

The Ghost Nets and Marine Debris Initiative has been refunded. The federal government has promised securing \$25.1 million over four years to tackle ghost nets and debris in Northern Australian waters.

ABORIGINAL ranger groups will continue the fight against ghost nets thanks to a federal government commitment to refund the program.

Each year, tonnes of discarded fishing gear wash up on remote Northern Territory beaches, harming wildlife and precious sea country.

Aboriginal ranger groups spend huge amounts of time and resources removing the rubbish.

Even though the program was very successful, supporting rangers to remove over 1000 nets and 190 tonnes of debris, it was uncertain if the program would continue to be funded.

In January this year, the federal environment minister, Murray Watt, announced \$25.1 million for the program, a \$10 million increase.

Aboriginal ranger groups will receive \$20.6 million to clean up

beaches, remove rubbish from the ocean and work on recycling in remote regional hubs. The other \$4.5 million will be spent on prevention —working with nearby countries such as Indonesia and Papua New Guinea to stop nets and rubbish entering Australian waters in the first place.

Joanne Pomery, a senior Numbulwar Numburindi ranger, has watched the problem grow over the years.

"Seeing this plastic rubbish and nets wash up on my mother's Country hurts my spirit. It doesn't belong here," Ms Pomery told Land Rights News.

She said that marine rubbish was not only harming animals and Sea Country and was destroying culture too.

"What I really want to see is no more plastic. We can keep cleaning but it's only going to come back. We need to fix this problem at the source."

TOP END FESTIVALS 2026

**JUNE
5-7**

BARUNGA FESTIVAL
Barunga Community, NT

**JULY 31 -
AUGUST 3**

GARMA FESTIVAL
Gulkula, NT

AUGUST

EAST ARNHEM LIVE
Nhulunbuy, NT (Date TBC)

**AUGUST
21 - 23**

FREEDOM DAY FESTIVAL
Kalkaringi, NT

If you know of any other events taking place across the NLC region, get in touch!
Email media@nlc.org.au

Women at the heart of Learning on Country Program



Djelk Rangers in Maningrida.

Aboriginal Women are at the heart of Learning on Country (LoC), a program that brings together Aboriginal Ranger Groups and students from across fourteen schools in the Top End.

WOMEN are leaders in the program, making sure that learning is grounded in culture. They are coordinators, educators, advisors, cultural knowledge holders and role models. They walk alongside young women and girls, supporting them to stay connected to culture, learning and identity. They are nurturing the next generation of strong Aboriginal women.

Women are the majority of members of the all-Aboriginal LoC Steering Committee. The committee's Co-Chair, Cindy Jinmarabynana, has many years of experience as an on-Country educator and has helped shape the program's vision and success.

In 2024, the strong leadership of LoC was recognised nationally, when the program won the Indigenous Governance Award.

Across the program's 14 partner schools, most principals are also women.

On the ground, Aboriginal women are leading change every day. In Wadeye, the program's newest site, co-coordinator Lisa Mullumbuk brings nearly a decade of experience working with secondary students.

"I'm from Nardirri, north-east of Wadeye," Ms Mullumbuk said. "I've

worked at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Thamarrurr School (OLSH) with the secondary program for nine years. I love supporting students and helping them learn. I'm excited that the Learning on Country Program is at our school to engage our students and support a better future in both worlds."

In the last half of 2025, 2,862 students participated in LoC, almost half of them girls. These young women are not only attending school, they are thriving in culturally grounded environments that strengthen their identity and belonging.

Beyond the classroom, pathways into employment and further training have been developed through the program. Young women are getting nationally recognised qualifications in areas such as Conservation and Ecosystem Management, Maritime Operations, First Aid and Construction. Women attending these courses are seeing a future that connects cultural knowledge with tangible employment opportunities.

In Maningrida, five generations of women now work with the Djelk Rangers; most of them were part of LoC during their senior schooling. This shows what is possible when culture, education and opportunity come together.

The story of Learning on Country is guided by a story of women, of strength, leadership and commitment. Through their leadership, Aboriginal women are not only shaping the program, they are also shaping the future, empowering other women and girls to be leaders, role models and the heartbeat of their communities.



Cindy Jinmarabynana, Co-Chair of the Learning on Country Steering Committee, accepted the 2024 National Indigenous Governance Award for the LoC program.



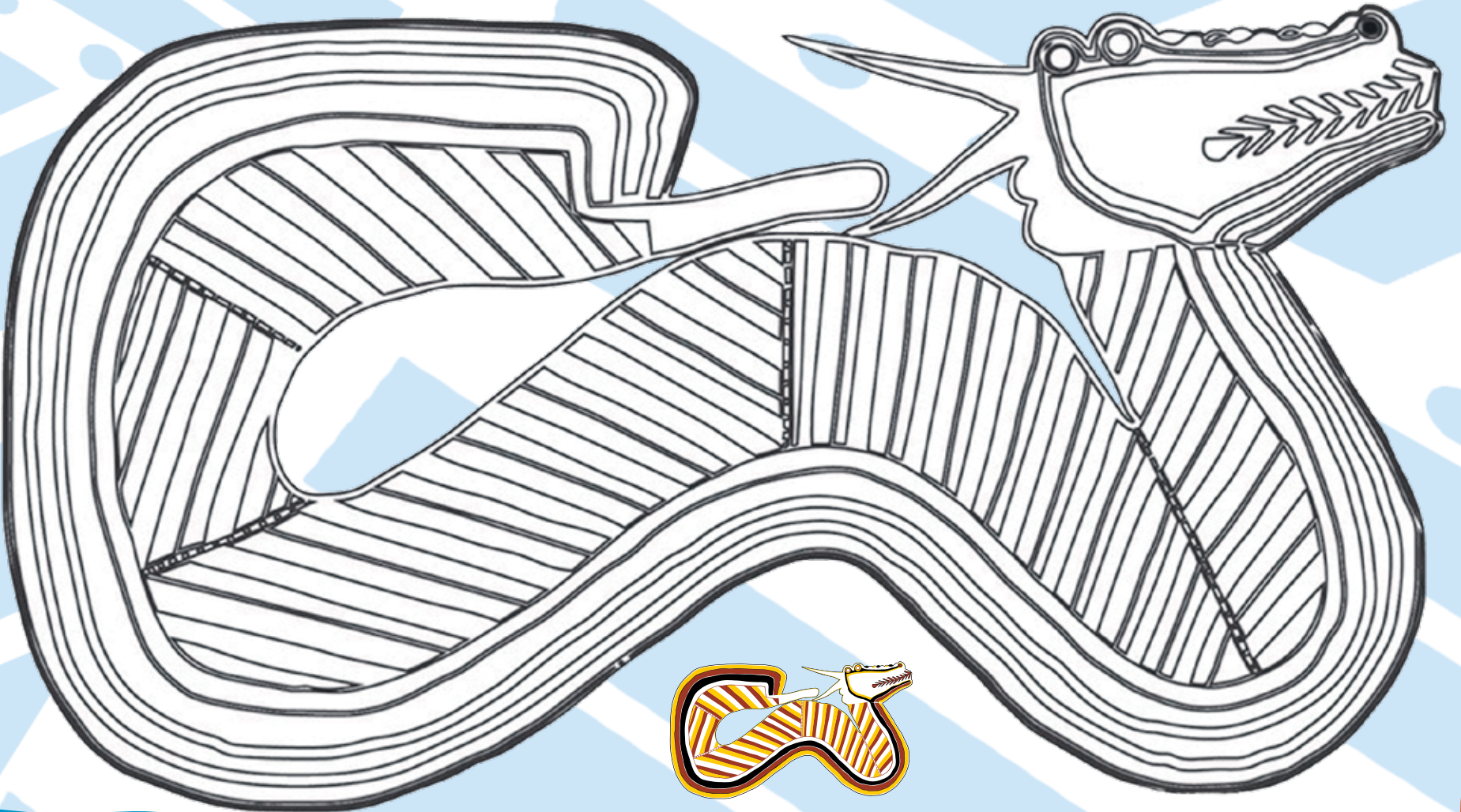
Female participants in the Learning on Country Program at Shepardson College in Galiwinku engaged in Maritime Studies.



Linda Williams (Ngukurr), Stephanie Anderson (Borrooloola), Cindy Jinmarabynana Co-Chair (Maningrida) address delegates at LOC Summit 2025.

COLOURING-IN COMPETITION

You can colour it in with the same colours as the logo, use your own ideas for colours and design. Take a photo of your colouring-in and send it via text message to 0437 485 995, or email it to media@nlc.org.au. Six lucky winners will have their work profiled in the next issue of Land Rights News and get some goodies from the Northern Land Council.



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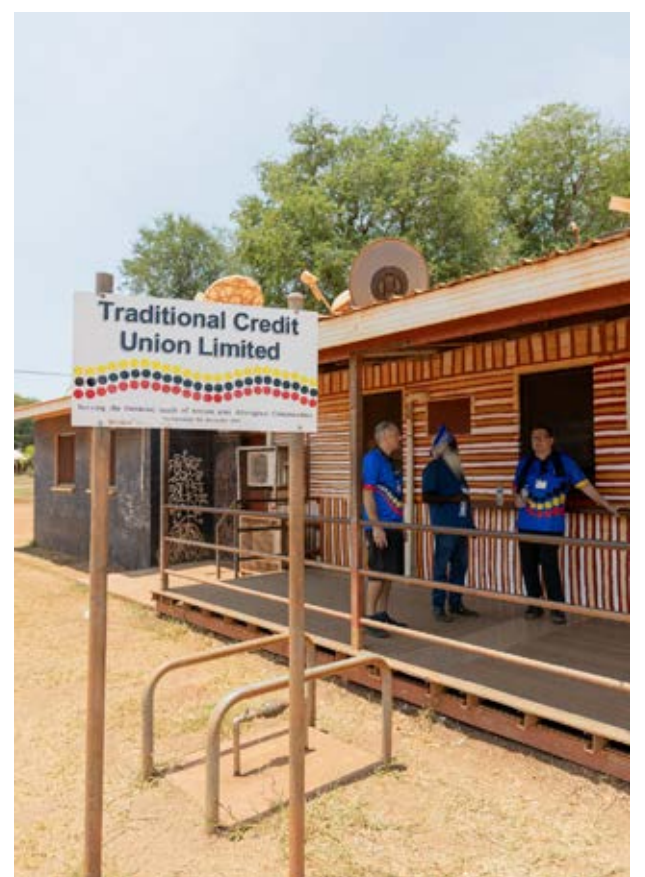


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Malak Malak culture centre gets million-dollar boost



Malak Malak Traditional Owners left to right: Evelyn White, Donna Sullivan and Matthew Shields.

Malak Malak Traditional Owners are one step closer to getting their culture centre, securing a \$1 million grant for the project.

THE new culture centre will tell the story of the Malak Malak people – keeping and sharing their cultural items and documents.

The idea first came about in 2019, when Traditional Owners created their Healthy Country Plan – a guide for families and Malak Malak Rangers to keep their land and culture healthy into the future.

They identified the need to develop a "multi-purpose culture centre hub" to support health, wellbeing and future opportunities.

For Matthew Shields, a Community Planning and Development (CP&D) working group member, the culture centre would mean a place to share the stories and history of his people.

"Growing up, I heard all these stories from my Grandparents. We've still got

lots of photos that should be kept and shown in a special and safe place," Mr Shields told Land Rights News.

"It's a shame that some of my older family that fought for our land rights will never see this cultural centre finished, but it's really important that it happens."

Traditional Owners have worked closely with the Northern Land Council's CP&D team to develop the idea. The group has invested a large amount of their own money from Land Use Agreements into the research and design stage of the project.

This has included visiting a number of cultural centres in Kakadu, meeting with other Traditional Owners to get an idea of how they could run their own business, and creating a building design through a series of workshops at Wooliana, on Malak Malak Country and in Darwin.

Mr Shields said seeing what other Traditional Owners had already done was very helpful and inspiring.

"We would be the first Traditional Owner group in the Daly region to set up our own culture centre. Seeing how

everyone else has done it made us really think that we could do it too," he said.

Joy Cardona, a Malak Malak Traditional Owner and member of the project's working group, said the space would preserve their story and create benefits for years to come.

"This is about paying respect to the old people, the ones that fought hard for what we have today," she told Land Rights News.

"It's also about preserving this history of the Malak Malak people so that generations to come can learn about, and feel proud of, our story."

With the Daly River region well known for its fishing tourism, Mr Shields said that building the culture centre was a great opportunity to educate people coming to the area about who's Country they were on.

"We get a lot of tourists coming in for fishing. I think it would be really good if they can also learn about who we, the Traditional Owners of the area are and what our story is," he said.

"This project will mean employment opportunities for our young ones – even

down to using local artists for the building."

Funding boost secures future of project

At the end of March, Aboriginal Investment NT approved a \$1 million grant to the corporation in charge of the project, Maddingya (Malak Malak) Aboriginal Corporation, to continue work on the project.

Ms Cardona said that, without this extra funding boost, the project may not have continued.

"This will mean we can start working with architects and make this a reality," she said.

She said that working on this project has brought the Traditional Owner group closer.

"We are aiming for something and want to achieve something. We have a vision and we know where we are going," she said.

"I'm proud to be involved in this project because we are protecting history and making sure it's on display for the future generation – not just for our kids, but for everybody that lives in the area."

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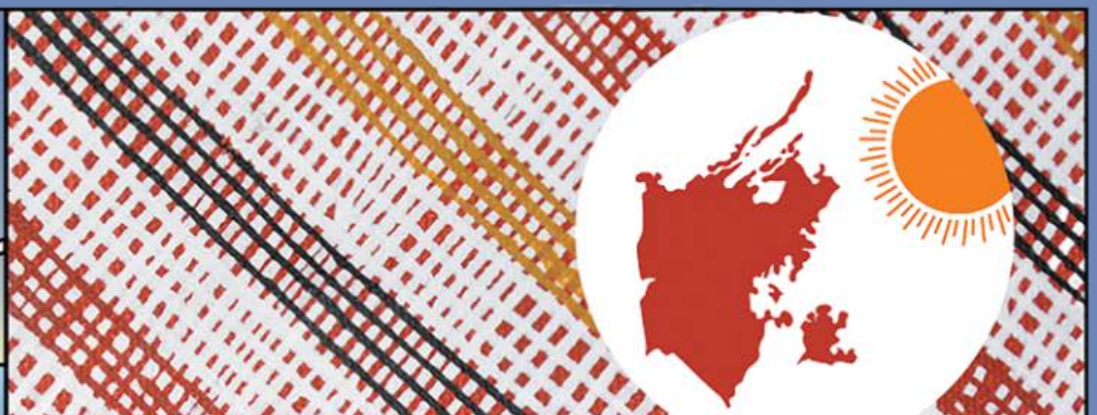
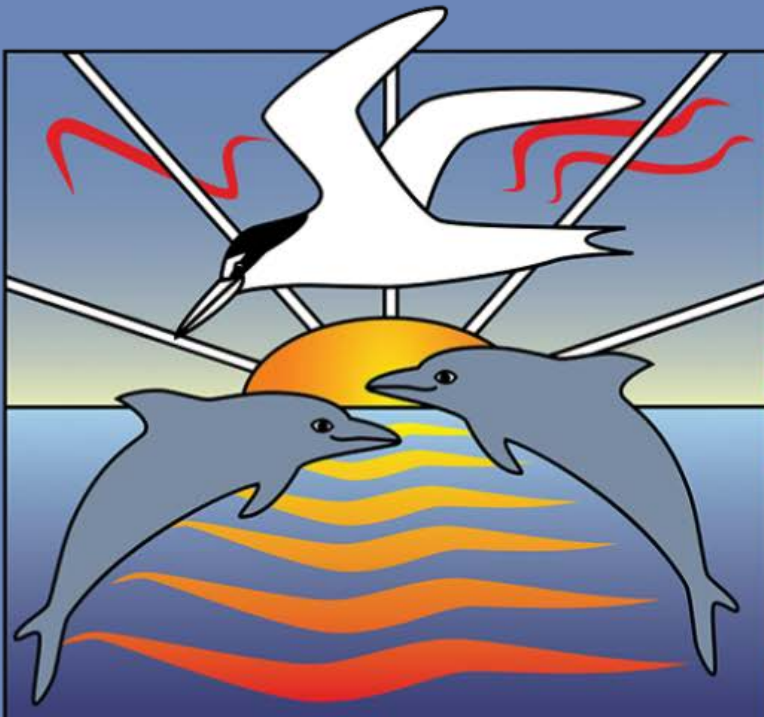
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Maningrida women take back control of their health



Left to right, Sharna Phillips and Betty Ankin sharing their lived experience.

Maningrida's successful Manayingkarirra (Maningrida) Healthy Women's Project will continue for another two years, producing educational resources in language about Type 2 diabetes.

IN 2023, the Women's Cultural Support Hub in Maningrida started the Manayingkarirra (Maningrida) Healthy Women's Project. The project started because the community wanted to focus on women's cultural health and tackle issues that worried the community. This process was part of a Local Decision Making Agreement between local Aboriginal organisations, the Northern Territory Government and the federal government. The Women's Cultural Support Hub is part of Mala'la

Health Service.

One of the first priorities of the Women's Cultural Support Hub was looking at ways to improve chronic health conditions in women. Menzies School of Health Research worked with the Cultural Support Hub to create a program aimed at improving care for women with diabetes in pregnancy and their babies.

In the first year of the project, Mala'la Health Service and Menzies talked to women in Maningrida about what was important to them from a health perspective. The women wanted to look at the big picture of women's health, and they changed the name of the project from Diabetes in Pregnancy to Manayingkarirra Healthy Women's Project.

Jess Phillips, Women's Cultural Support Hub Coordinator for Mala'la Health Service, explained more about the name change and focus of the project.

"It's not just diabetes – it's wellbeing tied to stress. We can talk about

diabetes all day, but it's the way of life in community that needs to change, and that's from top to bottom. From the shops to also talking to women and families in community," Ms Phillips told Land Rights News.

Over 140 women took part in the first stage of the Manayingkarirra Healthy Women's Project.

In total, the project ran 27 health education and physical activities on kidney stress, wellbeing and diabetes. This included cook-ups, a chance to speak to a diabetes educator, and exercises such as aerobics, pool-based exercise and gathering pandanus.

"While we did exercises at the swimming pool, we also talked about sugar and gestational diabetes," explained Ms Phillips.

The project even got one of the local shops onboard to encourage healthy food choices: the shop made fruit and vegetables cheaper and put healthy food at the front and lollies and soft drinks behind the counter.

The first stage of the project finished

last year, but it can now continue for two more years thanks to \$100,000 funding through the Diabetes Australia Community Priorities Grant.

In the second stage, the Manayingkarirra Healthy Women's Project will make new health resources in local languages. This will benefit women in Maningrida, where 11 languages are spoken. Mala'la Health Service also has four staff from different language groups to help run this project. The new resources will help community members manage and prevent Type 2 diabetes.

The partnership with Menzies has helped the Women's Cultural Support Hub continue to run the project locally, but it also relies on strong leadership from women in Maningrida.

The strong local leadership and ownership means the Manayingkarirra Healthy Women's Project can continue to support local women to better care for their health.

Barunga Festival returns to community management



Red flag dancers at Barunga Festival 2025.

This year Barunga Festival has returned to community control, bringing back many community favourites such as spear-throwing, tug-of-war and the Battle of the Bands.

BARUNGA Festival will be back on 5-8 June, now under Bagala Aboriginal Corporation management, with a dedicated in-house team delivering the festival.

Highlights of the festival this year

will include world-class Aboriginal music and dance performances, alongside local emerging talent, high-energy sports competitions, cultural workshops and a renewed focus on local employment.

A Battle of the Bands will take place on Saturday night, with local bands from the across the Top End, East Arnhem and West Arnhem battling it out for the best beats of Barunga.

A sports competition with softball and AFL teams will also run throughout the weekend.

Esther Bulumbara, senior Bagala Traditional Owner and Chair of the corporation, said she is "feeling good" about Barunga 2026.

"I want to try to make it bigger and better," she said. "We look forward to having art centres across the regions come and make up the vibrant market Barunga Festival always delivers."

Tickets are on sale now. Keep an eye out – the line-up will be announced soon!

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Review: Journey Home, David Gulpilil

Journey Home is an award-winning documentary about the funeral of famous Yolŋu actor David Gulpilil who wanted to invite the whole world to his funeral. This was the idea behind the documentary.

THE film follows Mr Gulpilil's final journey of 4,000 kilometres, starting from where he passed away in Murray Bridge, South Australia, travelling via Darwin and Nhulunbuy

Journey Home is a fitting farewell to one of the world's greatest storytellers.

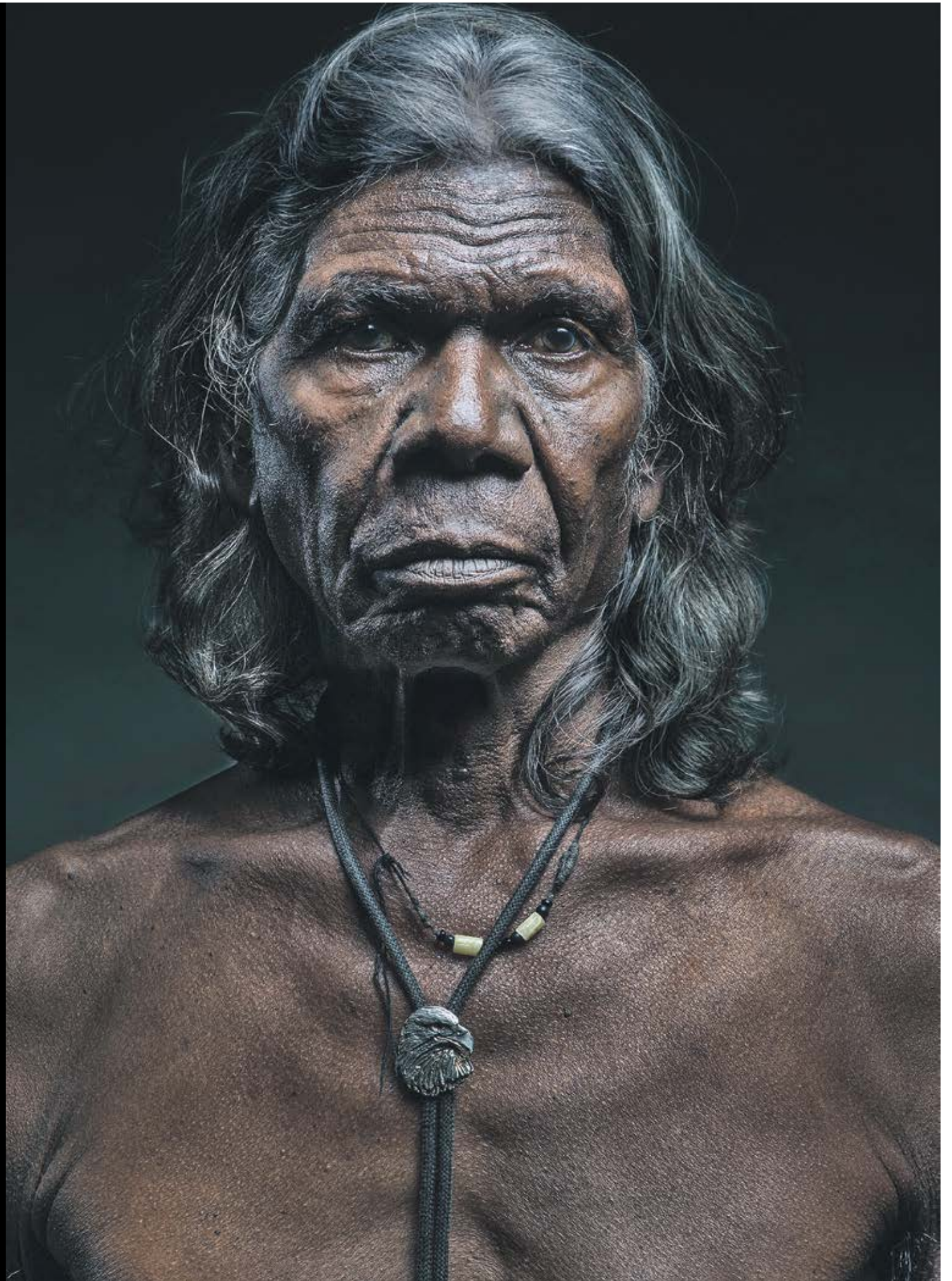
to his ancestral home and final resting place in Gupulul, North East Arnhem Land.

The journey involved planes, hearses and helicopters.

There were transport delays and weather issues, but every bit of the journey was rich with cultural meaning.

With the voice-over by Hugh Jackman and directed by Maggie Miles and Tricia Morton Thomas, and the full involvement of the Gulpilil family, the documentary is deeply moving; hilarious one minute and profoundly emotional the next.

Journey Home is a fitting farewell to one of the world's greatest storytellers. Catch *Journey Home, David Gulpilil* on NITV and SBS On Demand from 31 May 2026.



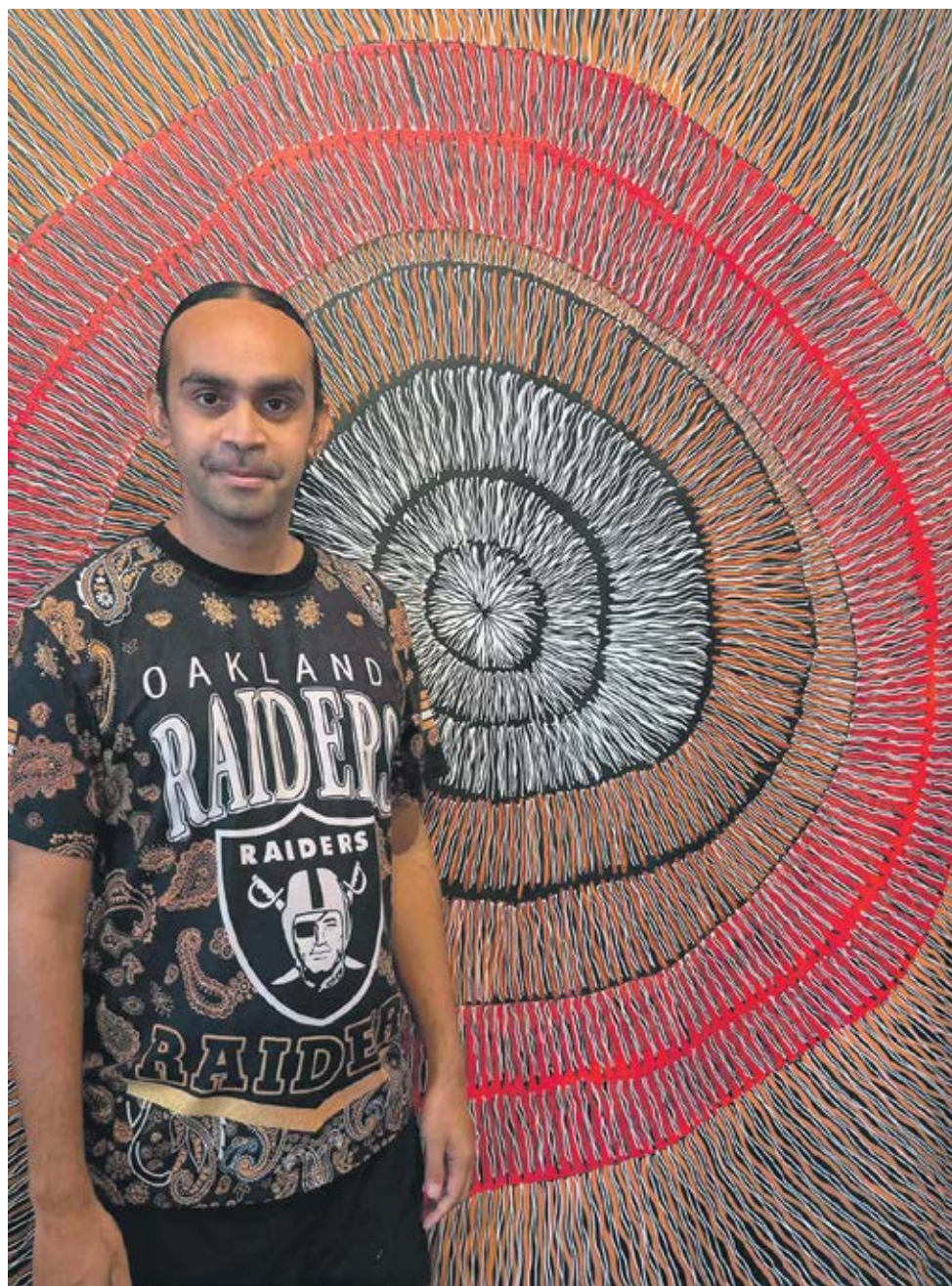
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Flooding Hits Merrepen Arts Community – You Can Help!



Kieren Karritpu standing in front of one of his paintings at Songlines Gallery, Darwin.

In February this year, when the Daly River broke its banks, Merrepen Arts Centre in Nauiyu community was well prepared.

FLOODS had hit the community two years before, and everyone knew what to do: the screens, inks, fabrics and other artists' materials were put up high, well away from floodwaters.

After spending four weeks at the evacuation centre in Darwin, the artists and artworkers returned to Nauiyu and breathed a sigh of relief. Everything at Merrepen Arts Centre had survived.

That feeling of relief, however, was short-lived. Within two weeks, the rains returned, and the community was quickly evacuated a second time to Darwin. Most people left by helicopter as the roads were already too dangerous

to cross. On this occasion, there was not enough time for the art centre to put everything up and away from the water.

"Every year we have floods, but this time it was really sad because we had just got back and we thought everything was going to be normal again," Kieren Karritpu, an artist and arts worker from Nauiyu explained.

The water rose more than 170 centimetres inside the Magellan House workshop, the sewing rooms, the kitchen, and the storeroom at Merrepen Arts Centre. The levels were higher than the big 1998 flood.

Fortunately, the gallery was built on higher ground away from the floodwaters. The office, paintings, prints and fabrics stored in the gallery were safe.

Fixing the workshop will take many months and artists will not be able to print at the centre for a long time although the art centre can still print some fabric designs with partner



Kieren Karritpu selling fabric to the public at Songlines Gallery, Darwin.

organisations in Sydney and Melbourne while the workshop is being fixed. Artists can now paint at Songlines Gallery in Darwin, which has been very supportive. Merrepen Arts fabrics and artworks were on sale to the public at Songlines gallery on Saturday mornings in March and April.

"It was really lucky we had Songlines here to help us," Kieren told Land Rights News between selling fabrics to the Darwin community at Songlines, who came out in force to support the community.

The majority of community members from Nauiyu were first sent to stay at the evacuation centre at Darwin Showgrounds. They were then sent to Batchelor in late March and will stay there until the community can be rebuilt.

"We really want to support our artists, even if it means we have to pick them up from Batchelor and bring them here," Kieren explained. "They don't have many

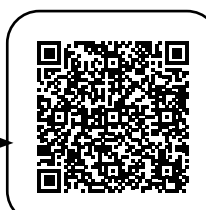
activities there (at Batchelor), but at least here, the artists can paint."

The art centre is also hoping to find somewhere in Darwin where they can start to print their fabrics again. Talks are underway.

Although it could be many months away, Merrepen Arts is preparing for their return to Nauiyu. Before the flooding they were not able to get flood insurance which means that they now have to find another way to pay for the cleanup, the repairs and new equipment. They have started a crowdfunding campaign. This means that anyone interested in helping the art centre can donate, buy art or share the campaign with their friends and family.

The crowdfunding campaign is hoping to raise \$35,000 and Merrepen Arts is well on its way to making this happen. The campaign will close on 20 April 2026.

Visit the
campaign
Page



NT coach fills big shoes in Indigenous All Stars



Shari Overall as Assistant Coach to the Indigenous All Stars women in February.

Shari Overall is the first Aboriginal woman from the Northern Territory to be appointed assistant coach for the Indigenous All Stars Women's team for rugby league.

IN February, Indigenous All Stars beat the Maori All Stars in New Zealand, 20-16.

This year, Shari was the only representative from the NT to be a part of the Indigenous All Stars Women's team.

Shari was flattered to be asked to be assistant to Head Coach Jessica Skinner, who is the Jillaroo's Head

Coach and one of Shari's mentors.

"I was very honoured to be working alongside her (Jessica) and to be amongst the bigger team that went away as well," Shari told Land Rights News.

Shari is proud to be part of the NT Rugby League pathways, which is a development program for rising junior players in the NT. As part of this program, she had the opportunity to be a part the NRL NT RISE Coach program, which develops community coaches, and provides mentoring, specialised training, and on-field experience. Through this, she has grown as a coach and player.

"I'm literally a product of the program up here in the NT for the rugby league system," said Shari. In 2023, she had the opportunity to be the assistant coach for the Prime Ministers XXIII Women's Rugby Squad, which took her to Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea.

When she was offered the role of assistant coach for Indigenous All Stars, Shari was nervous at first.

"Sometimes a bit of self-doubt came to mind, but I knew no one in that space would have let me fail," she said.

It was a unique experience, she said, and will stay with her for a long time.

"I have a whole new level of respect for the athletes and the other staff

that put this whole program and work together.

"The job of the Head Coach in this elite space is next level."

From this experience, Shari has learnt to trust herself and know that she's done the work.

She has worked hard to become the coach and role model she is today and treats that position in the NT community with respect.

"My two kids play footy up here in the NT, so it's really nice to be that kind of person. You can't be what you can't see, right?"

"We don't get enough footy up here, or people playing in big teams that come up and play. So the kids really don't get to see much unless they travel outside of the NT. But not many kids do. Last year, I took the under 16 Titans girls away, and that was the first time some of them stepped into a stadium in Townsville."

She currently coaches the Litchfield Bears Women's team and is the Under 16s Girls Titans Head Coach. Her message to young girls or women is to grab every opportunity that comes their way.

"Take every opportunity that comes your way, enjoy everything about it, and just have fun along the way.

"If you're not having fun, it's not worth it in the end."

Arnhem Crows Women's Team set for success in 2026

A big shout out to the Arnhem Crows AFL Women's team. They are about to start their 2026 season with a bang, after they were nominated for a 2026 Northern Territory Sports Award for Best Regional Performance.

THE Crows continue to perform well, winning the 2025 Big Rivers Football League Premiership for the third time in a row, and the grand final victory against the Ngukurr Bulldogs. NT Australian of the Year nominee Malcolm Hales has been brought on board as the Crow's coach in 2026 and they are hoping for a sixth premiership under his leadership.

According to Crows' player and former team Captain Tedisha Bush, the team are very excited about the year ahead.

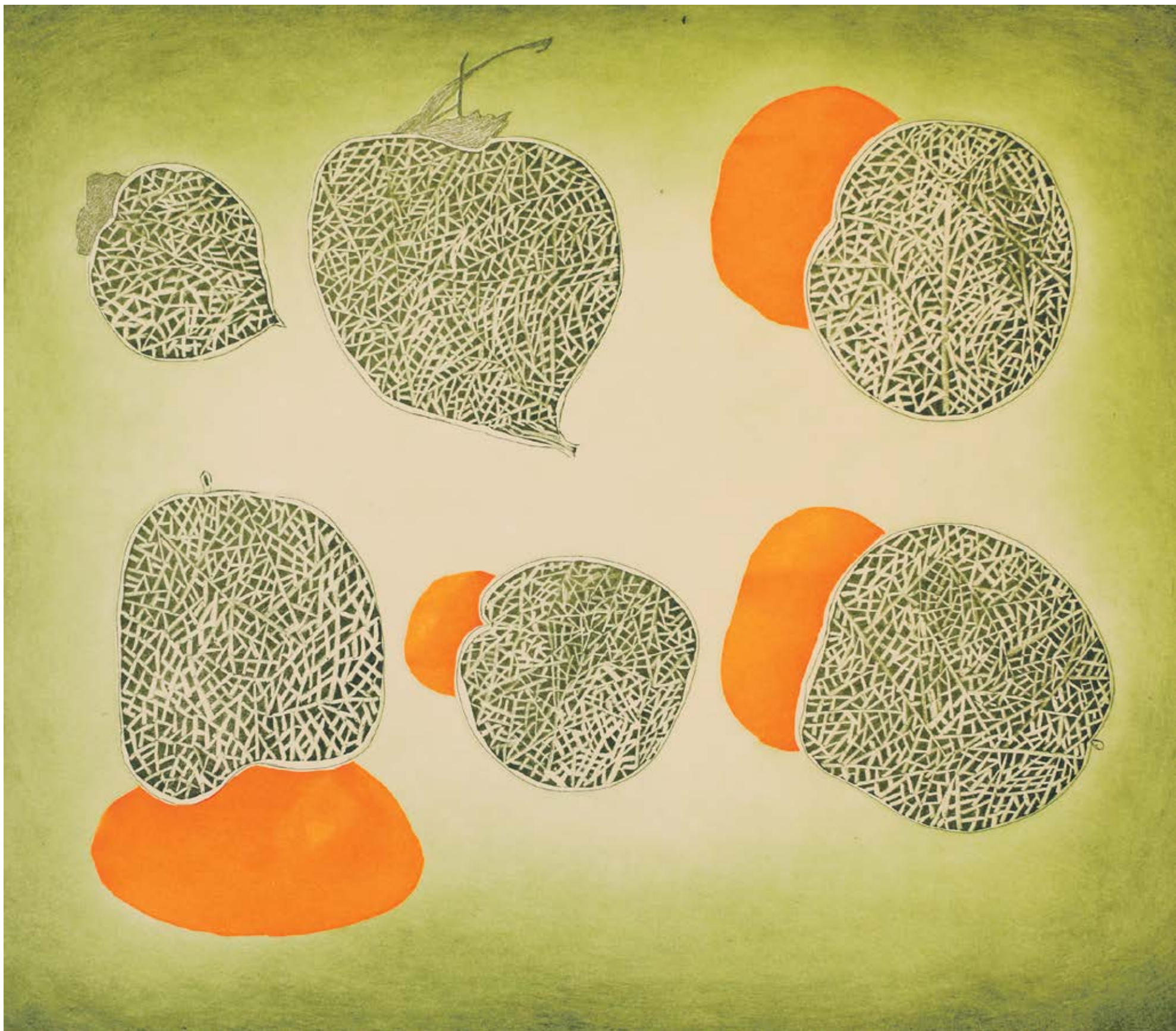
"The girls are training hard at the moment getting ready for our first match in May," she said. "Being part of the team means a lot – especially for the girls from Beswick and other areas who have been dealing with the flooding in their community recently.

"I love seeing how the team helps build their confidence on and off the field."

The Crows will be honoured at the NT Sports Awards on 28 March. Regardless of the result, they are already winners!



Arnhem Crows AFL Women's team ready for the 2026 season.



Ganya'wu

Artist: Bitharr Maymuru
Homeland: Djarrakpi
Clan: Mangalili
Moiety: Yirritja

Land Rights News showcases the work of artists from across the Northern Land Council's seven regions on its back cover. This edition features a painting by Bitharr Maymuru from Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre in Yirrkala.

About the artwork

This plant belongs to Mangalili songs and tells us when it is time for the Duykal (giant trevally) to be hunted. It is the poison nut (cashew). You can't eat it when it is still hot. The flesh on the outside is poisonous and can burn your skin, so we use gloves to find the nut inside. Then we bury it under the sand. When the fire gets smaller, we put the coals over the sand where the nut is buried, and it slowly roasts. Then we eat it.

*Dhuwana dharpa Mangaliliwu ga
 nyai lakaram gurra Duykalpuy walu.
 Dhuwaya ga ganyawu yaka nanapu
 nuli luka nunhi nyai gurrmurya,
 goŋ nanapu nuli gunganhami marr
 yurru yaka nanapu goŋ botjin-dhu
 bathan dharwaryun-dja nanapu
 nuli bala nanapu nuli dhukumana
 munathayina bala lirrwin gunhayun
 garwarryi bala nanapu nuli lukana.*

About the artist

Bitharr Maymuru is an artist and senior printmaker and arts worker at Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre. She started working there in early 2016 and has since developed her skills as a printmaker by participating in several workshops, both in the Yirrkala studio and abroad.

In June 2016, Ms Maymuru participated in Sean Smith's printmaking workshop, where she produced her first linocut work. Other workshops with Sean Smith have included etching techniques and screen printing.

In early 2017, Ms Maymuru travelled to Castlemaine to assist in opening the Balnhdhurr – A Lasting Impression exhibition – and to conduct its associated public programs.

Ms Maymuru is a key representative of Buku-Larrngay at art fairs and events Australia-wide. In 2019, she completed an arts worker extension training through the Association of Northern, Kimberley and Arnhem Aboriginal Artists (ANKAAA). She continues to grow her skills and knowledge base across many aspects of Buku-Larrngay's operations.