LAND RIGHTS NEWS

NORTHERN EDITION

NORTHERN LAND COUNCIL

OCTOBER 2026 • NLC.ORG.AU



OUR WATER, OUR RIGHTS



Garma highlights P15



Yiŋiya Guyula resigns P3



YiSSA closure P7

AUSTRALIA'S OLDEST ABORIGINAL NEWSPAPER SINCE 1973

EDITORIAL

Land Rights News Northern Edition is published by CEO Yuseph Deen for the Northern Land Council printed by Newscorp Australia, Printers Place, Darwin NT 0800.

ISSN 2653-3723

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

FOLLOW US

@northernlandcouncil

@northernlandcouncil

@NorthernLandCouncil

SUBSCRIPTIONS

To subscribe to our digital edition of *Land Rights News*, fill out the online form at nlc.org.au

ADVERTISING

Rates are at nlc.org.au/media-publications or email:

media@nlc.org.au

Circulation:
3,000 print and 700 digital

FRONT COVER



Bulla Traditional Owner, Shadrack holds up a "do not drink the tap water" notice.

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

Chair address





Matthew Ryan at YiSSA.

AS we head towards the final few months of the year, it's important to look back at all that's happened – the good and the bad.

In June, the Northern Land Council's Housing and Homelands Committee and Water Committee came together for the first time, raising important issues around the poor quality of drinking water in Northern Territory remote communities.

This is an issue that has impacted our people for far too long and must be addressed by all levels of government.

The closure of YiSSA in October was a massive blow to our most vulnerable Territorians. The people who use YiSSA are from right across the NT, and are often there because their own remote community does not have the health or social services they need.

The relocation of the service to Batchelor – an hour away from health, education, or domestic and family violence services – is not acceptable.

A solid plan for how residents will access to these services is yet to be seen and I fear that many of our mob will be forced into unsafe accommodation or onto the streets until another service is stood up in Darwin.

We remain worried about how the NT Government will handle natural disasters that might come through remote areas during the upcoming wet season.

The way our people were treated during the evacuations and until they were able to return home was unacceptable, and we are yet to see any action taken to make sure the events of this year are not repeated.

Our voices continue to be ignored by this NT Government. We will, however, continue – alongside the other strong Aboriginal organisations – to raise the alarm on the attacks our people continue to face.

Despite this, there has been much to celebrate.

This year's Garma Festival brought people from across the country and world to beautiful Gulkula, to celebrate the strength and power of Yolŋu culture, music, art and politics.

Over in Numbulwar, Traditional Owners celebrated 800 hectares of Sea Country being added to the existing South East Arnhem Land Indigenous Protected Area.

This has been 10 years in the making and will mean Traditional Owners have full control over managing their land and sea, protecting it for future generations.

After years of hard work and advocacy by strong women in our region, the NLC's first Women's Ranger Strategy is out in the world. This is an important document that not only demonstrates the challenges and barriers our women face getting into ranger work, but what the way forward is.

And in a massive win for water rights, Native Title Holders from Central Australia won a High Court challenge against a water licence that had been granted to Singleton Station.

As we head toward the end of the year, it's important that we keep strong – even if it feels hard.

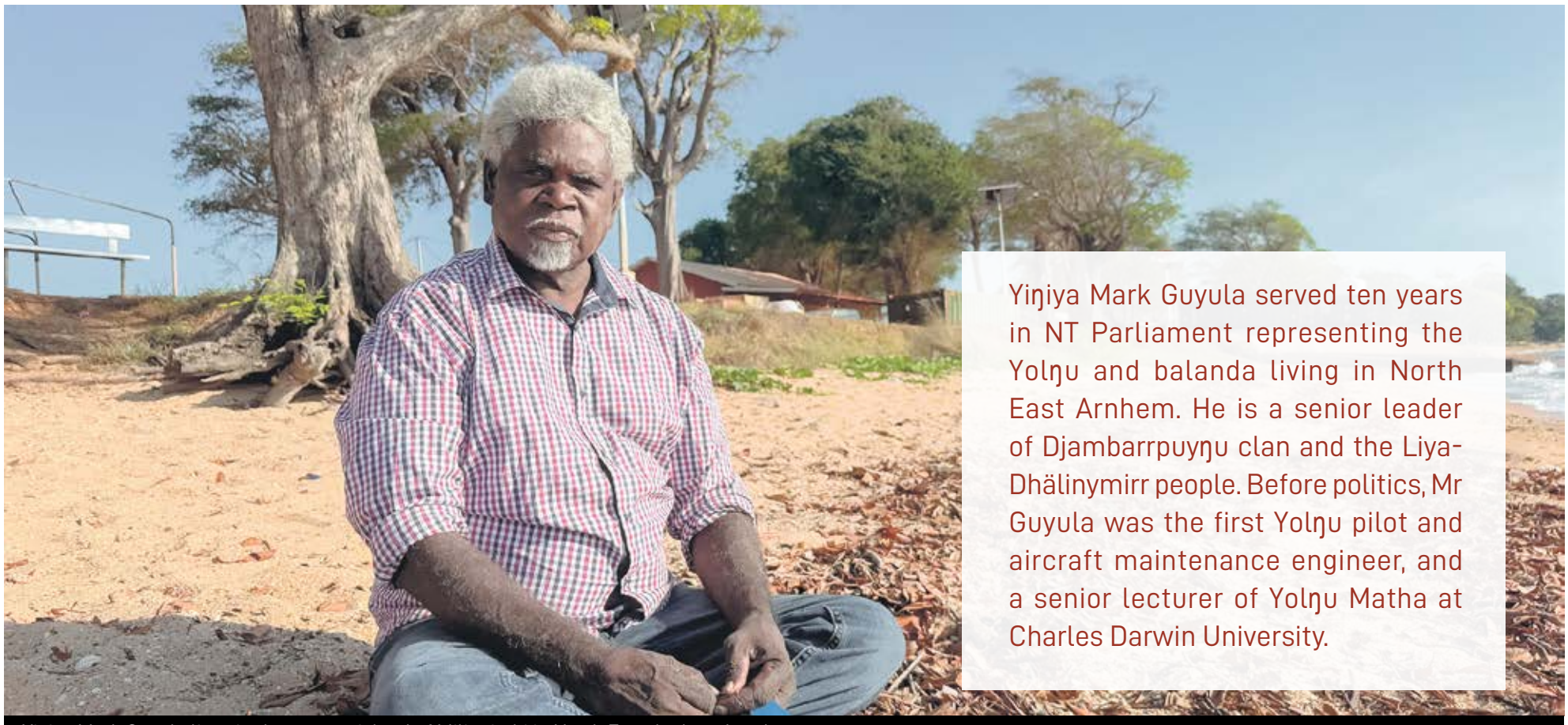
Our voices have been ignored, and we have been kicked from all sides. We are a resilient people, and we must remember that we have the solutions.

With over a third of all land and sea under NLC management, we are open for business.

We want the same social and economic opportunities for Traditional Owners that everyone else has.

We will continue to ask that this government and the Commonwealth Government talk to us, consult us, and work towards solutions that mean better outcomes for all Territorians and Australians.

A step out of government onto higher ground



Yiŋiya Mark Guyula served ten years in NT Parliament representing the Yolŋu and balanda living in North East Arnhem. He is a senior leader of Djambarrpuyŋu clan and the Liya-Dhälinymirr people. Before politics, Mr Guyula was the first Yolŋu pilot and aircraft maintenance engineer, and a senior lecturer of Yolŋu Matha at Charles Darwin University.

Yiŋiya Mark Guyula lives in the remote island of Milingimbi in North East Arnhem Land.

I never wanted to be a politician. I was a senior lecturer of Yolŋu Matha at Charles Darwin University when the NT Intervention happened. At that time, we heard lots of Balanda (non-Indigenous people) saying, "This is really bad news."

I was working dharrwa djäma (a lot of work). But I had to leave my lectures in Darwin to be with my people in Yurrwi (Milingimbi).

I came back to fight the Intervention with Dhuwal Rom (the law of this country).

I stood here and sat down, and saw the Intervention actually come through Yurrwi. The army came in and they had guns. This is a story from my eyes. I saw it happen with my people. We stood there.

What did we do? What's going on? They came because of something that happened far away in the country of other people.

They said, "We are going to change everything for you. We are actually taking over this land."

We said back to them, "Excuse me, we are the people of this land. So how can you take control over us?"

They set up at the park. They built their own portable health centre in the middle of the town. We didn't understand what was going on.

In the meantime, in Galiwin'ku, senior Elders Mala were gathering together to call on the government to come and listen to us. And if they didn't listen, the Elders would start to walk along the country.

In Yurrwi, we had lots of jobs. There were Yolŋu plumbers, electricians, and people sitting in offices in the council here. There were Yolŋu leaders running the council. The Intervention people put a Balanda CEO in charge and decided who would have jobs. They asked about our certificates and experience. I showed them my certificates. I am an aircraft maintenance engineer, an aircraft pilot, senior lecturer. The man at the table said, "No, no, you won't be needing this. Put this away," and he gave me a garbage bag, and lawnmower. "You can start cleaning up the parks around here." They did the same thing to many people.

The government did not listen to the Yolŋu leaders. The senior Elders brought clan groups together and started the Yolŋu Nations Assembly. They walked across country, and all of a sudden, I saw them here in Yurrwi. I joined them and became one of the Elders. I became a spokesperson for them. We made our way to Maningrida.

Then, a Balanda who was working with us said he would run in the next election to fight this system. I asked, "When is the election?" It was in two months' time. I said, "Wait, maybe I should run too. See if I can do it. I want to get that power back and our voice in the chamber." We worked together to travel and raise money and speak to the people.

I was coming in with the Yolŋu Rom (Yolŋu law) that my people created. And the people said, "This is our chance. This is a leader who will stand for us."

I won by eight votes.

I walked into the chamber at NT Parliament and spoke the message from my people.

I spoke in Yolŋu Matha in the chamber, but they stopped me. "It is not allowed," I was told. I kept trying. I kept trying. Only after I went to the media, the government made an agreement to let me speak Yolŋu Matha in the chamber. They left it on the table quietly. Now, anyone can speak Yolŋu Matha in NT Parliament.

Things can only get better if we sit alongside each other and work together.

Today's government doesn't listen or sit down with us. Politics is running over our Indigenous culture – who we really are. The government don't accept Yolŋu Rom.

You're seeing a lot of crimes happening in Yolŋu community. That is not how it was. That's not our policies. It is the confusion coming in the mind of our people.

The government does not listen. They don't want to work with us.

After being in parliament for 10 years, I decided to leave the government this year. It's given me experience. I look back in my journey: I can't believe I've done flying school, teaching, and politics in parliament. I know a lot more about the Balanda systems than the Balanda know about Yolŋu Rom.

Today, I am a mentor. I can work outside of the government, with my people and Yolŋu Rom.

Yiwarr: I am glad he will be able to speak Yolŋu Matha in the chamber. You need to stand exactly where you are.

We hold the knowledge – forefathers from many generations on this country, and that's who we are. Napurrunydja gana ŋunhi (we were there).

I am a Guyula man from Buckingham Bay, and I am a Djambarrpuyŋu man from Buckingham Bay. That is my wäŋa (home). I haven't chosen who I want to be. I was born with the land, through the land, during the time of creation. From the soil, from the land, the songlines that we sing, the languages that we learnt: that is what we need to maintain.

We still come back, and we want to sing songlines about how our ancestors walked the country.

You can move us from here, but you will never move our souls from this country because we are spiritually born from the ground.

I stepped out of government onto higher ground.

Q&A | NORTHERN LAND CO

Land Rights News spoke to two new



BILLY HARNEY JUNIOR

Northern Land Council member representing Menngen community in the Victoria River District (VRD), about 200km southwest of Katherine.

Billy is a member of the NLC Water Committee.

You've lived in Menngen since it was set up in 1999. What was it like returning to your Country?

In 1999, my father Billy Harney, who is chairman of the Wardaman Association, helped win land rights over Innesvale Station – and he set up the homeland Menngen. I've been here since then.

I worked for a long time as a stockman on cattle stations around the VRD area.

I grew up with my old man telling me stories and telling me about sacred sites of the area. I did everything with my old man. I also went to a lot of meetings as a proxy for him, and so that got me used to communicating with everyone about all kinds of issues.

Why did you want to be an NLC member?

I didn't decide. The family group decided. It was overwhelming. But now I feel ok about it. My old man was there at the time when I got on the council, and it was great to be in one of them for real.

It made me feel great, because that way I can say things and do things for my Country and for my family.

I'd like to see change in the way where we're living. Get this place (Menngen) up and running for everyone to work together.

Why do you think it's important for people to speak up and talk for their Country?

It is very important because this way I can be a good example to my kids and my grandkids.

How can you encourage younger people to get on council?

I think the best way is to keep them out bush, like how we live here. That way they can keep connected to Country and their culture. They have a lot less distractions and problems if they aren't in town.

What are the things that you'd like to see improve while you're a member of the NLC?

I'd like to see change in the way where we're living. Get this place (Menngen) up and running for everyone to work together. I want to support all the clan groups around here too; it's important to work together. And it would be the best place as an enterprise for everyone from the outside to come together in one box, and they can share their story, their interests, or whatever they need, you know.

What's your favourite thing about being a council member so far?

It was very good to meet up with other people because they didn't realise who I was. When they found out who I was, the people that I don't know from other regions, they know my old man. So, they was all happy for me to come on board, and they all turned around and said to me that they'll be willing to help me, too, if I need help to talk.

You're also a member of the NLC Water Committee. Why is that important for you?

Water has always been very important to me; it's part of my Dreaming.

Aboriginal people have a strong connection to water because it's part of our songs, stories, and sacred sites. Whereas white men might want to come down to drain on the water and then destroy everything. But for us, we know that water connects everyone and everything.

What would you like to see come out of that Water Committee?

I'd like to see change, so people won't humbug for drilling gas and all that. I don't like drilling. I don't like gas. I don't like land clearing. I worry a lot that they are just going to try to drill deeper and deeper, and it's going to hurt where we get our water from.

UNCIL MEMBERS

y Northern Land Council members.

What made you join the Northern Land Council?

Actually, I was asked by the late chairperson Dr Bush-Blanasi, because we had no representation from our Bulman and Weemol area. So, I said I'll come on board.

I suppose people look to me as an Elder. Not because of my age, but you know they look at you because you have that respect for others, and you're not there for yourself. You're there for the people itself.

Have you faced any challenges while working in a leadership role?

There has been a lot of challenges. There's a lot of stuff actually that need to be done that have been raised at regional council meetings, and then also at the executive level and at full council. But some stuff had sort of taken a very long time. I suppose it's a slow-motion sort of thing, because you don't want to make any mistake in between.

Have there been any achievements in your community lately?

Not long ago we celebrated the Mimal IPA [Indigenous Protected Area] for our region. I think it's a big win for us. We waited for so long for it to happen. It's looking after a country, having that ownership and keeping it together. You want to look after your Country. You want to keep outsiders away from it. And have the right decision made by the right Traditional Owners. It's that ownership that's given.

And you've got homelands. That's another thing we're trying to find funds for, and it' a battle.

We've got seven homelands. Out of the seven, we have three that are activated, that people are living in it. They do get a little bit of funding from service providers, but it's not a lot of money. What we are trying to do with the Mimal land management is get the land and say, yes, we want Mimal to actually be the service provider for us, and then we'll go look for more funding. So, slowly, slowly I guess, a day at a time.

Then there is the employment side of it, which has more Indigenous staff than non-Indigenous. We have people that are on a senior ranger role, male and female. There are a lot of staff that get up and speak up at meetings. It's about having something.

Then there is the employment side of it, which has more Indigenous staff than non-Indigenous. We have people that are on a senior ranger role, male and female. There are a lot of staff that get up and speak up at meetings. It's about having something.

What inspired you to become the leader you are today?

It was hard in the '80s. I left school, had no job, couldn't find any traineeship. There was no support whatsoever. The best education I got was in English and a bit of maths. But I got sick and tired doing the same thing every day. And then a friend of mine, a white guy, helped me up. He said, "Look, you got to do something for yourself and give people everything."

I'd like to see a younger generation actually go to school, finish their education, and go up to get a higher education, not just stop it because they finished Year 12.

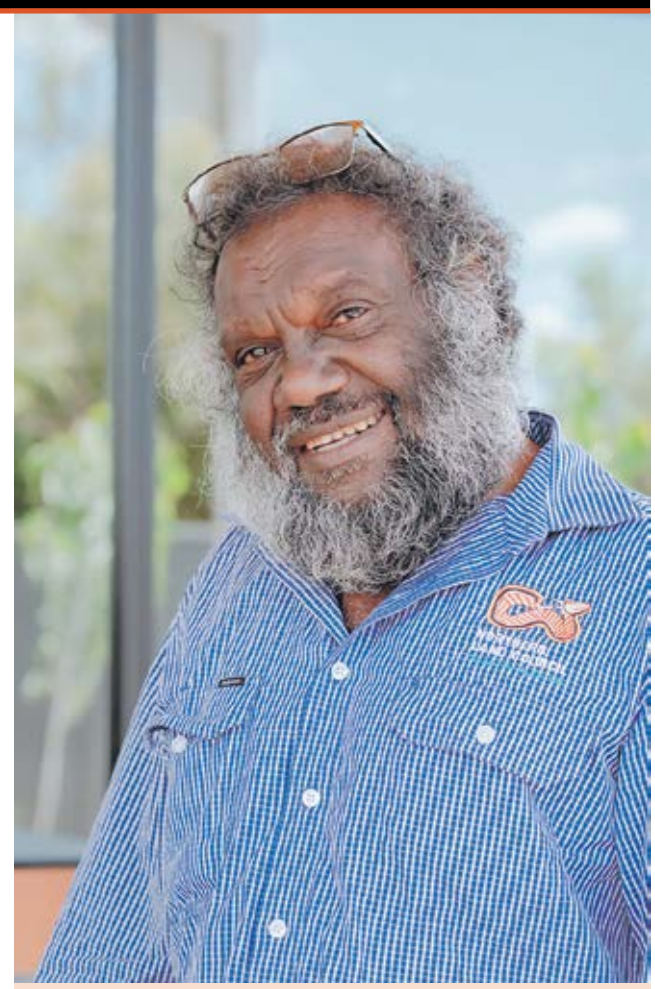
So, I saw white people, actually NT government, coming out talking to our people. My Elders couldn't understand a word of what they were saying. So, I stepped in and said, "Look, explain what you just said in a simpler English." So, from that day on, I took a step forward, being and becoming that spokesperson for my community and for my people.

So, I'm kind of in both worlds.

What would you like to say to young people in your region who want to step up?

I'd like to see a younger generation actually go to school, finish their education, and go up to get a higher education, not just stop it because they finished Year 12. Pursue other education in different areas. Get a traineeship of some sort, especially in land management part of it, and that will help the individual.

Then, have a look at the country. What are the Elders doing? What is Mimal doing? And you just have a look at the damage that's been done by feral animals. What do you want to do? Look after your land. You look after the environment. There's a lot to be done. And it can only happen from the individual.



JOHN DALYWATER

John Dalywater represents the community of Weemol in the Katherine region. He sits on the Executive Council and has been a member of the Northern Land Council for over 20 years. He continues to be a strong advocate for homelands, building up his community and taking care of his Country.

Mr Dalywater is the Chair of Mimal Land Management and has been on the board for seven years.

He also sits on the Sunrise Health Service board and is a re-elected Councillor for the Nyirranggulung Ward (Manyallaluk, Barunga, Beswick and Bulman) on the Roper Gulf Regional Council. He has been working to improve life in community for a long time.

A new home for Larrakia culture

AFTER more than two decades of planning, advocacy and negotiation, the Larrakia Cultural Centre opened its doors at Darwin's Stokes Hill Waterfront in September. The $58.6 million project is a significant milestone for the Larrakia people, providing a permanent place to share and celebrate Larrakia Country, language, history, arts and knowledge.

Located beside the Stokes Hill sacred site, the centre has been designed with Larrakia culture at its heart. Its distinctive roofline evokes a bird in flight – a Larrakia ancestral being associated with the cultural significance of Stokes Hill – while the surrounding landscaping reflects monsoon, savanna and coastal environments found across Larrakia Country.

The centre includes exhibition and gallery spaces, education facilities, art studios, function rooms, retail space, an outdoor auditorium and a café and restaurant. Visitors can explore Larrakia history and contemporary culture, engage with language and take part in cultural activities including traditional arts and crafts.

Importantly, the centre is intended to remain Larrakia-owned and governed, with its vision extending beyond tourism. The Larrakia Development Corporation describes it as a place for Larrakia people to share, celebrate and showcase their culture while creating employment, business and economic opportunities for future generations.

For a project more than 20 years in the making, its opening marked a beginning as much as an arrival. The challenge now will be turning the vision into a living centre for Larrakia culture, community, education and a living centre for Larrakia culture and community.

Speaking at the official opening in September, Larrakia Development Corporation Chair Mark Motlop said the new centre would "fill a void" in cultural education in Darwin. "People rock up in Darwin, they want an Aboriginal experience, and they want a Larrakia experience," he said. "In the past we haven't had that, we've had dribs and drabs ... this is a one-stop shop."



Larrakia celebrate the opening of the new Larrakia Cultural Centre.



Crowds gather at the opening of the Larrakia Cultural Centre at Stokes Hill Wharf.

LEGAL BITES

Native Title holders win historic water license case

Native Title Holders and Traditional Owners have celebrated a big win for water rights, with the High Court of Australia ruling in August that the Singleton Station water licence had been unlawfully granted.

THIS is the first time a groundwater licence has been challenged by Traditional Owners in the High Court and represents a landmark moment for Aboriginal Water Rights in Australia.

The decision stops what would have been the largest groundwater licence ever given to a company in the Northern Territory. If it had been allowed to go ahead, 40 billion litres of water would have been taken from the ground every year for 30 years.

If the company wants to try again to obtain the license, it will need to wait for the Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority to complete an environmental impact assessment..

Wagiman Traditional Owners stand strong for their country

Wagiman Traditional Owners travelled to Melbourne in September to attend the Federal Court hearing on a decision made by the Federal Minister for the Environment to approve land clearing on Claravale Station and farm.

THIS was an opportunity for the Traditional Owners to speak up strongly against land clearing on their Country, which they have opposed since it allegedly began in 2021.

The judge is expected to deliver a decision in October.

YiSSA closure sidelines vulnerable Territorians

Closing a Darwin homelessness shelter and moving it to Batchelor has left vulnerable Territorians cut off from health, education and social services.

UP to 450 people live at YiSSA, operated by Yilli Rreung Housing Aboriginal Corporation (Yilli), at a time. It is used mainly by people from remote communities who need to stay in Darwin to receive life-saving healthcare, such as dialysis.

Families escaping domestic violence and people experiencing homelessness also use the service.

In July, the Northern Territory Government announced it would close the current Darwin site and open a new facility in the small town of Batchelor.

Residents and several frontline service providers said this was not a good option: Batchelor is too far from hospitals, clinics, domestic and family violence support and other essential services.

"I have a job in Darwin. I can't go out to Batchelor," YiSSA resident Rose Laynbalaynba said.

Northern Land Council Chair Matthew Ryan said shifting the service out of town did not make sense.

"These are people who use the facility because, much of the time, the health or social services they need are not available in their remote communities," Chair Ryan said.

"There is not one remote community that isn't affected by this appalling decision," Chair Ryan said.

Before the closure, many residents left without saying where they were going. Yilli CEO Yvette Park said it was likely they had either moved into overcrowded homes or were now living in the long grass.

"People have told us that they do not want to go to Batchelor. There are no services out there and they are worried about how they will get to their health appointments or legal appointments," Ms Park said.

NT Chief Minister Lia Finocchiaro said it was people's choice whether they went to Batchelor.

"We have stood up an alternative facility that provides people with food, care, clothing, a warm bed and a roof over their heads," Chief Minister Finocchiaro said.

However, when residents arrived at the new facility in Batchelor, heavy machinery was still operating, and the plumbing and electricity were not connected.

Chair Ryan said it was clear the NT Government had no idea what it was doing.

"These are people's lives — vulnerable people who need support. This government is moving them around like cattle, sending them to a facility that is not even ready," he said.

He also said he was worried about the coming wet season and how the new facility would accommodate people evacuated from their communities because of natural disasters.

"The Batchelor site is one-third the size of the Darwin site. I don't know how they will accommodate all the YiSSA residents and the people who need to leave their communities because of flooding," he said.

"Our concerns are being completely ignored, and we are tired of it. Something must change."



Protest against the closure of YiSSA at the National Homelessness Conference in Darwin .

Bringing strong women together



Women at 2026 Strong Women Healthy Country forum. .

This year's Strong Women Healthy Country brought together over 200 women to share, learn and connect.

WOMEN rangers, coordinators and Traditional Owners travelled to Bawurrbarnda in Central Arnhem Land to attend the 2026 Strong Women Healthy Country forum.

Women of all ages and backgrounds took part in weaving and cultural knowledge workshops, talks on workplaces, governance, leadership, and domestic and family violence, and activities celebrating women's knowledge and connection to Country.

First held in 2019, the forum has played a vital role in connecting women rangers with one another.

For the Northern Land Council's Women Ranger Coordinator, Leslie Gordon, the chance to attend the forum with colleagues and other women working in the same field was incredibly important.

This year, the NLC supported 33 rangers, support staff and Women's Council Advisory Group members to attend the forum.

A highlight of the week for Ms Gordon was hearing empowering speeches from strong women working across different sectors. "These stories encouraged participants to recognise their own strengths, leadership and the important role women play in caring for Country, supporting their communities and creating pathways for future generations," she said.

The week was rounded out with a final special celebration: Mimal and Numbulwar Elders leading a Buŋgul and teaching traditional dances.

Ms Gordon said, "It was a wonderful way to finish the forum and created a strong sense of connection and unity among women from across the Top End."

Strong women, strong Country: NLC launches landmark Women's Ranger Strategy



Left to right: Leslie Gordon, Mary Blyth and Sheila White.

In July, the Northern Land Council (NLC) published its Women's Ranger Strategy, a document that will shape the way women rangers work and grow in their roles.

SINCE 1990, the NLC's Caring for Country program has been an important way to support Traditional Owners to work, manage and protect their land.

While women have always had an important role in this work – using their cultural knowledge to protect women's sacred sites and holding stories and songlines that travel across land and sea – they face significant barriers to doing this work.

Family commitments, culturally unsafe facilities at ranger bases, and a lack of flexible work options mean that women are often not able to work in ranger roles or move into positions of leadership.

For years, women rangers have called out for a guiding document that not only acknowledges these barriers but provides a path forward.

The strategy was developed over a number of years by talking directly with Aboriginal women rangers and builds on the 2021 NLC Women's Employment Strategy.

Joy Cardona, a senior Malak Malak Traditional Owner, said the strategy recognises women's authority, and the responsibilities they carry, and commits to supporting women's leadership now and into the future.

"If we are serious about caring for Country we must be serious about supporting Aboriginal women to do this work safely, with dignity and authority," Ms Cardona said.

The strategy sets out six goals that strengthen women's leadership, participation, safety, wellbeing and future pathways across the Caring for Country unit.

Leslie Gordon, the NLC's new Women's Engagement Coordinator, is one of the people rolling out the strategy across the NLC's ranger program.

"The first big priority is around training, mentoring and career pathway development. Developing those women to be the confident decision makers and leaders they have the potential to be," Ms Gordon said.

"They have the skills; they just aren't always accredited in the Western system … so that they can become coordinators and assistant ranger coordinators."

Ms Gordon said they had welcomed Sheila White to the Caring for Country team as the Women's Mentor.

"Sheila has come across from the Strong Women's Healthy Country Network Program, so she brings a wealth of lived experience and has strong connections across many Top End communities," Ms Gordon said.

NLC Cultural Liaison Officer, Mary Blyth, said the strategy was "a long time coming" and that she was proud to see it out in the world.

"This strategy is what the women have asked for, and I do really think it will help build all that up again and build them up, build their confidence up, and get them into those leadership roles," Ms Blyth said.

Traditional Owners reclaim sea country'



SEAL IPA members sign the sea country declaration in Numbulwar.

For the past decade, South East Arnhem Traditional Owners and rangers have had official say over how to look after and work on their land. Now, they have their say over Sea Country too.

IN August, the community came together to celebrate the official signing over of Sea Country to the South East Arnhem Land Indigenous Protected Area (SEAL IPA).

This new protected area adds around 800,000 hectares to the existing estate and makes it the largest Aboriginal-managed Sea Country in the Northern Territory.

The area is managed by Aboriginal ranger groups — the Numbulwar Numburindi Rangers and Yugul Mangi Rangers — and a committee of Traditional Owners, who use a mix of traditional and Western science to take care of Country.

see the video!

Located in the western Gulf of Carpentaria, the marine area of the IPA provides critical refuge for marine wildlife threatened elsewhere by coastal development, pollution, and maritime traffic.

There are over 90 IPAs in Australia that Traditional Owners have agreed to manage for biodiversity conservation.

Launched in 1997, the IPA program supports First Nations peoples to care for their Country through voluntary agreements with the Australian government. Caring for Country includes cultural site management, threatened species monitoring and protection, marine debris removal, weed and pest animal management, traditional fire management, tourism, and educating younger generations.

Senior Numbulwar Ranger and Traditional Owner Clive Nunggargalu has looked after this Country for many years as a ranger. "This is my Country. It's important for me to look after it, just like the old people did before me," Mr Nunggargalu said.

While the declaration was a big celebration, it was also a time to remember the work of the people who were no longer with them.

Traditional Owner and IPA Committee member Virginia Nundhirribala, said it was important to remember the work the old people put into this agreement. "Our old people worked very hard for this day. I feel sad in my heart that they aren't here anymore. They would be very proud of seeing this come back to us."

Ms Nundhirribala said it was important that people across the region continued to look after their land and Sea Country.

"Our Country is changing. The fires are hotter than before...some of the animals, we can't find them anymore, they are dying," she said.

"That's why we need to come back and make it stronger, for the future generations. We need to teach those kids about what this country is and what it means for them."



Traditional Owners bunɡul in celebrations of IPA.

NT Aboriginal Rangers Fight Bird Flu



Magpie Geese are susceptible to bird flu.

The H5 bird flu is expected to hit the Top End before the end of the year. Aboriginal ranger groups say communities need better information about it.

PROTECTING remote Northern Territory coastlines and communities from bio-security threats has become a big part of the job for Bulgul Land and Sea Rangers and Kenbi Rangers.

And with the H5 bird flu spreading across the country, rangers are doing their best to prepare remote communities for when the disease arrives.

"It's not a matter of if bird flu reaches us, it's when," senior Bulgul ranger Timothy BurrBurr said.

Magpie Geese, ducks and other shore birds are a traditional food source for many people in remote Top End communities.

Mr BurrBurr is worried communities don't have enough information about the disease or what they need to do if they see a sick bird.

"We are trying our best to warn mob about what this disease is. It's really important that, if you do go hunting for geese or other birds, you make sure you cook them properly before eating," he said.

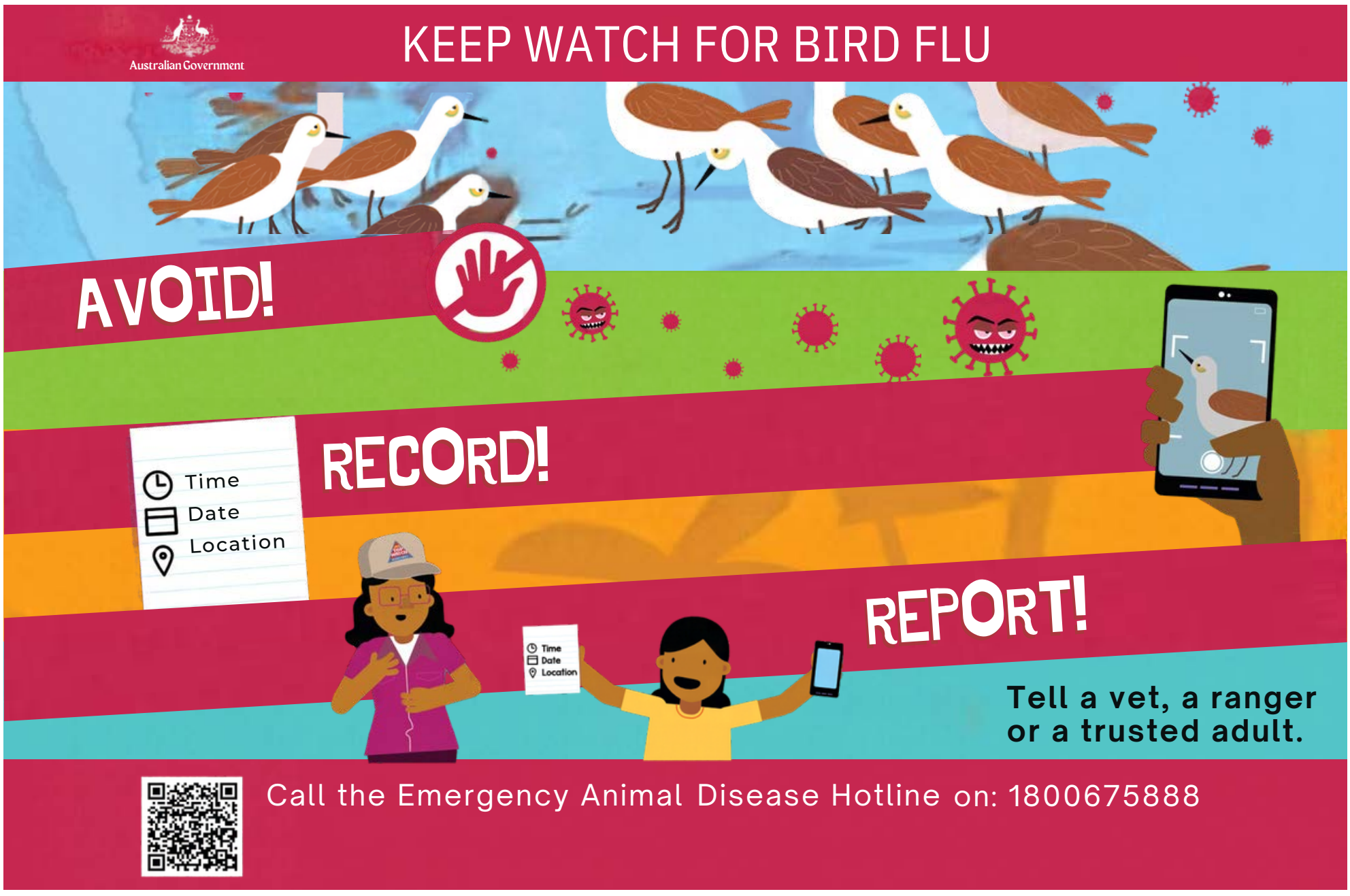
"And if there's any dead wildlife or anything like that, just not to touch it, and to report it to the bio-security hotline."

Rangers have been working hard in the last few months to spread health information as best they can. But they are worried that the message isn't getting around as much as it needs to.

"I think rangers are well placed to be the ones spreading these important health messages because we are trusted and know people in communities," Mr BurrBurr said.

"But this isn't our only job, and we can't be the only ones who are telling mob about this.We definitely need some more support to spread the word."

Cook your birds properly if you're hunting. Take a photo or video of any sick birds and report them to rangers or the animal disease hotline on 1800 675 888.



Traditional Owners call on Governments to fix water and power in the bush



Shadrack Retchford in Bulla.

Unsafe drinking water in remote communities across the Top End has been an issue for decades. Now Traditional Owners are calling for action.

ABOUT four hours west of Katherine, people living in the small community of Bulla have been told their tap water is no longer safe to drink.

Since June, Power and Water have dropped off big 10 litre bottles of water out of the front of people's houses every two weeks.

Scientists have found that the levels of the chemical, Barium, are five times higher than what is considered safe in drinking water.

Scientists keep an eye on the level of different chemicals in drinking water to make sure it is ok for people to drink.

Because there haven't been enough tests done on what Barium does to humans, experts aren't sure what the long-term effects of this chemical on humans are.

Bulla Traditional Owner and NLC Council Member Shadrack Retchford said he was worried about the water quality long before Power and Water started the water drops.

"I didn't trust that bore water because I was worried it was making me sick. Headaches, tummy ache...that kind of thing," Mr Retchford said.

"I really had to humbug that Power and Water mob to do something about it."

Mr Retchford said he is glad the community is getting water delivered now, but there has not been enough information given to the community about what can be done.

"How long has the water been bad? Are we going to have to drink this bottled water forever? No one has told us anything," he said.

"It just makes me feel worried because if we have been drinking bad water, what is that going to do to our health?"

Marjorie, a teacher at Bulla school is worried that the kids are still drinking the tap water.

"They are little so they aren't thinking. We try and tell them but it's hard to make sure they don't do it," Marjorie said.

"It just makes me worried because what is the impact of this for future generations?"

Further north in Nauiyu, residents have also been told to drink bottled water.

Damage to the bore water system during the big floods at the beginning of the year has meant the water is unsafe to drink.

Now, bottles of water are dropped off out the front of the community store at the start of each week. Residents come to collect it each day, getting in early before the sun heats up the water.

Nauiyu resident, Grace Mardygan, said she was happy there was free bottled water available.

"I never drank the tap water here anyway. It's always been a bit funny, so I'm happy that we have this bottled water now," she said.

There has been no information on when it will be fixed and how long residents will have to rely on bottled water.

In June, the Northern Land Council Water Committee and the Housing and Homelands Committee met to discuss the importance of essential services like water and power in remote communities.

The Committees said that the NT and Commonwealth needed to stop putting these issues in the "too hard basket".

"Housing and homelands on our country is our right as Traditional Owners, and essential services is the lifeblood that makes this possible," Wayne Wauchope, the Chair of the Housing and Homelands Committee said.

You can read the full statement here: nlc.org.au/joint-statement-nlc-water-committee-and-housing-and-homelands-committee.

Investment flowing to Country

Across the Northern Land Council (NLC)'s seven regions, Aboriginal-owned enterprises and community organisations are building businesses, training workforces and delivering essential services on Country. They do this with support from Aboriginal Investment NT (AINT).

IN West Arnhem Land, the Maningrida Progress Association (MPA) is delivering real, practical solutions to the housing shortage. In September, MPA received a $1.5 million AINT grant to build more rooms at the local motel. Maningrida has a population of 2,600 people. But for many years, the community has struggled to attract and keep essential staff, like health staff and construction workers, because there are not enough houses.

The bigger motel will also use solar and battery technology, so it isn't putting more pressure on the local power grid. "The $1.5 million injection will allow MPA to expand its local motel accommodation, directly addressing the housing bottleneck and paving the way for sustained economic growth," said MPA CEO Ian McLay.

In Darwin, on Larrakia Country, a mobile eye care service is travelling to remote communities and events, including the Barunga Festival and Garma. The Deadly Vision mobile van meets people on Country so they don't have to travel to the city. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people older than 40 experience blindness at six times the rate of other Australians.

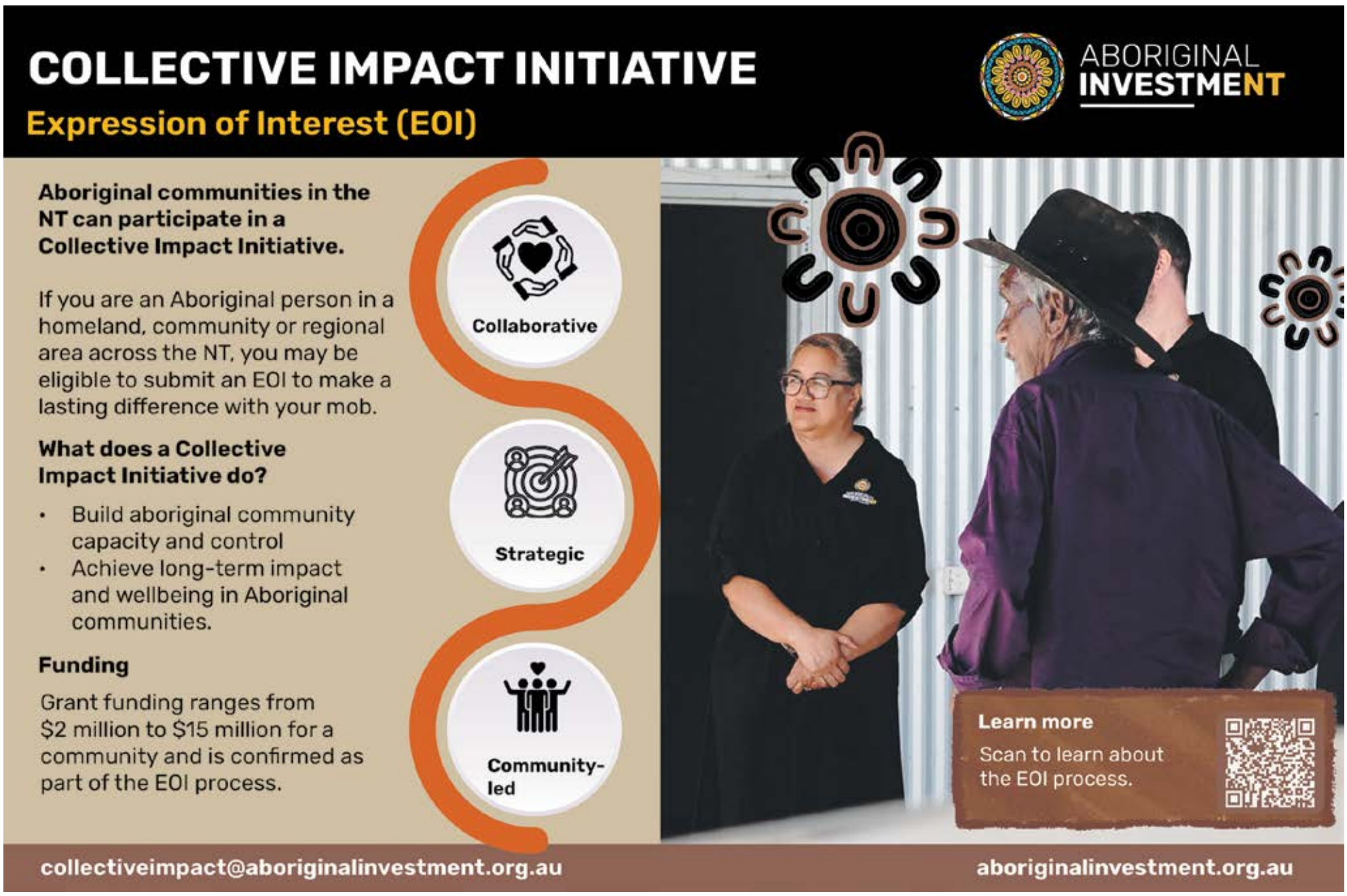
The Deadly Vision Centre, founded by Shaun Tatipata, is Australia's first Aboriginal-owned eye care service, and has used investment support from AINT to put the van on the road. "From clinic-based appointments to outreach and community programs, we meet mob where they are — with respect, understanding and pride," explains Shaun.

Meanwhile, also on Larrakia Country workforce capability and leadership development is the focus of the Rise UP program, delivered by Tanyah Nasir Consulting Service. The organisation has operated across the Territory for 14 years, and recent investment from AINT has supported the development of a digital learning platform and curriculum built by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people. The program now supports four full-time jobs for Aboriginal people.



Sean Tatipata and the Deadly Vision team transforming eye care in remote communties

Together, these projects reflect what community-driven economic development looks like: enterprises shaped by, and for, Aboriginal Territorians.



GARMA 2026

Held annually at Gulkula in North-East Arnhem Land, Garma is Australia's largest and most significant celebration of Yolŋu culture. It is a major forum for cultural exchange, community, leadership and national dialogue.



The 2026 festival marked its 26th year and coincided with the 50th anniversary of the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976. Key themes included Yolŋu culture and language, economic development, land rights, post-mining opportunities and the future of remote Australia.

Speaking from Garma, NLC Chair Matthew Ryan acknowledged the significance of the festival, "celebrating land, language and culture, and also celebrating 50 years of the Land Rights Act".

Bluey reaches Yolŋu djamarrkuḻi (children)



Bluey with djamarrkuḻi (children) at Garma.

The children's television show *Bluey* is available in Yolŋu Matha (languages) for the first time – reaching children from remote communities of North East Arnhem.

BLUEY has reached North East Arnhem Land audiences in Yolŋu languages this year. Five episodes have been translated into Yolŋu Matha, with free screenings at Nhulunbuy, Yirrkala and Garma Festival.

Beginning as a dream project in the Yolŋu Radio station five years ago, ARDS Aboriginal Corporation has made a dream come true through a lot of work and perseverance.

To bring one of Australia's most loved children's programs into First Nations languages is about making *Bluey* for bukmak (everyone).

Five episodes were chosen to be dubbed because of their connections to family and Country, to be culturally relevant and accessible in Yolŋu Matha.

ARDS Interim Co-CEO and Co-Djägamirr (manager) of Yolŋu Radio, Sylvia Nulpinditj is also senior broadcaster for Yolŋu Radio and director of the *Bluey* project.

Helping *Bluey* speak Yolŋu Matha was more than just about translation.

"It's a celebration of First Nations languages as living, thriving entities that continue to be spoken, shared and passed on every day. It is an opportunity for Yolŋu children to hear one of Australia's most loved programs in the languages of their parents, grandparents and communities, while also inviting audiences across the country to connect with the richness and diversity of First Nations languages," Ms Nulpinditj said.

Translations and creative decisions were shaped by Yolŋu voices at every stage. The project was not only linguistically accurate, but culturally grounded and reflective of the communities it represents.

Ms Nulpinditj attended the screening in Yirrkala and enjoyed seeing the outcomes of *Bluey* in language.

"When I saw one of the clips that was done by the Yolŋu Radio team in the Yirrkala movie night, the kids were fascinated, and freaking out over all of the characters speaking in language."

"They loved it. They were like over the moon for it," she said.

ARDS approached the ABC with a proof-of-concept episode, which was so well received that, after 12 months, the ABC supported the commissioning of the five episodes.

The five episodes feature the Yolŋu languages of Dhuwaya, Djambarrpuyŋu and Dhaŋu languages.

For Ms Nulpinditj it was important to have more than one Yolŋu Matha language.

"The five episodes of *Bluey* were all in language, and not just one particular dialect group language [of Yolŋu Matha].

"There were more than two languages involved, and I think that's the joy," said Ms Nulpinditj.

"Rather than selecting a single variety of Yolŋu Matha, we encouraged each cast member to perform in their first language. This allowed the dialogue to feel natural, authentic and true to the way people communicate every day across Yolŋu communities," said Ms Nulpinditj.

These special *Bluey* episodes are not just for Yolŋu, but to share Yolŋu language and culture with the world.

"What audiences will hear in *Bluey* is a reflection of contemporary Yolŋu life, where language remains strong, dynamic and deeply connected to identity, family and community," said Ms Nulpinditj.

ARDS CEO Julia Wormer said this collaboration had been special in so many ways.

"In many ways, the language heard throughout the series mirrors the rich linguistic landscape that Yolŋu children grow up with every day."

"*Bluey* has become a shared language for families right across Australia, so to hear these stories told in Yolŋu Matha is incredibly special."

"We're grateful to the ABC, Ludo Studio, and our incredible cast and crew for helping bring this vision to life," she said.

"We hope this project contributes to a future where First Nations languages are increasingly heard, celebrated and recognised as a vital part of Australia's story."

Baker Boy returns home to Garma



Baker Boy performing at Garma 2026.

For the first time ever, Baker Boy performed at Garma to a Yolŋu audience in North East Arnhem Land.

MANY people know Baker Boy as the "Fresh Prince of Arnhem Land", but behind the awards, sold-out shows and international success is a proud Yolŋu man from the remote community of Milingimbi in North East Arnhem Land.

Ahead of his performance at the Garma Festival, Baker Boy reflected on his journey.

"There are a lot of moments that make me feel proud," he said.

Performing alongside international rap star Snoop Dogg in the 2025 AFL Grand Final, winning the 2022 ARIA Album of the Year, and becoming one of Australia's most celebrated Indigenous artists are among his biggest achievements. However, for Baker Boy, returning home and performing in front of family and community is just as important.

"Coming back home and performing in front of family is one of the proud moments," he said.

Performing at Garma held special meaning for the award-winning artist.

"I'm so nervous and excited at the same time. But headlining a show here is really a proud moment."

Beyond the music, Baker Boy said sharing Yolŋu language and culture with the world is at the heart of everything he does.

"It's just who I am and where I come from," he said.

"Growing up, always being taught to embrace culture, embrace who you are and where you come from and stuff, and be proud of it.

"I think that's one of the things that just come naturally to me. I like to share culture through my music, tell the stories, keeping language strong that way."

Baker Boy also hopes his success inspires young people from remote communities to chase their dreams.

"I also want inspire all the young kids to kind of see me, and be like, 'Oh, he's just like me from remote community. I can, go out and do all that stuff too, and not be ashamed'," he said.

As Baker Boy took to the stage at Garma, the crowd was not only celebrating a successful musician, but also a proud Yolŋu storyteller using music to strengthen language, culture and community for the next generation.

His inspiration comes from family, the O.G. Baker Boys.

"I've always been in that environment of dance and music, a lot of families and buŋgul ceremonies and all that."

He hopes to inspire young Indigenous boys and girls coming through the music industry to be confident.

"Be proud of who you are and where you come from, and chest up, have no shame, and enjoy, have fun – have so much fun."










Garma












WE WANT LAND
























Garma


50
YEARS
1971–2023
LAND RIGHTS NEWS
LAND RIGHTS NEWS

Blue Mud Bay: The flag, Country and people behind the story

The Blue Mud Bay Sea Rights Flag is an important part of sea rights history, telling the story of the fight for Sea Country and the long-lasting connection Aboriginal people have with their Sea Country.

IT is more than a flag. It carries history and Country. It carries Sea Country.

The flag's design shows the voices, strength and determination of Traditional Owners and Yolŋu people who stood up for their rights and their responsibilities to Country; rights, responsibilities, values and traditions that have been passed down through generations.

The Sea Rights Flag was designed by Nuwandjali Marawili and was released shortly after the 2008 High Court decision in the Blue Mud Bay case that Aboriginal Traditional Owners control access to tidal waters over their land.

The flag is a powerful symbol of identity, belonging and connection, and stores the knowledge and cultural authority of Yolŋu people and their enduring relationships with Sea Country.

The white, blue, black, yellow and red hold specific meaning, representing the clouds, the sea and the landowners. It also represents the sadness, suffering and blood of the people.

Today, the Blue Mud Bay Sea Rights Flag remains a strong expression of culture, pride and identity for Aboriginal people in the Top End and beyond.

It honours the voices of Elders, Traditional Owners and communities, and stands as a reminder that the connection between people and Sea Country is strong and will continue for generations to come.



Nuwandjali Marawili standing with the Blue Mud Bay Sea Rights Flag.

Healthy homelands, healthy people: Voices from the Homelands Forum



Chair of Laynhapuy Homelands Aboriginal Corporation Yananymul Mununggurr speaking on panel at the Homelands Forum in Garma 2026.

For generations, Aboriginal people across the Northern Territory have maintained deep connections to their homelands: places where culture, language, family and knowledge are carried forward and where people continue to care for Country.

AT the Homelands Forum, held at Garma, Aboriginal leaders, homeland organisations and service providers came together to share their experiences and make a call for greater recognition and investment in homelands.

Marcus Mungul Lacey, from Marthakal Homelands, said the authority of Traditional Owners must be recognised before development or other decisions are made on Country. "When you come for development, or in terms of anything else, you have to approach us through the right way, through consultation," he said.

"Our cultural authority needs to be established and to be recognised right across the region."

He said the governance structures that have existed for generations remain central to the survival of Aboriginal people. "Our governance structure is part of a universe that holds the key to our survival that we practise since the time began."

For Yananymul Mununggurr, Chair of Laynhapuy Homelands Aboriginal Corporation, the connection to homelands is deeply personal. She spoke about her grandfather's role in helping families return to Country and the responsibility she now carries in continuing that work.

"For me, it's important for us to keep on continuing living and working on Country, working on our traditional clan estates," she said.

She said homelands provide much more than a place to live. They support language, culture and identity, while also creating opportunities for education, tourism, art and other enterprises.

"It's not only about protecting, preserving our laws, our culture, our identity. It's also about educating our young children," she said.

Many speakers highlighted the direct relationship between housing,health and infrastructure, with one speaker describing the message simply: "Housing is health infrastructure."

Safe housing, reliable power and water, functioning sewage, transport, communications and access to healthcare are all essential to ensuring people can live safely on Country. Without that infrastructure, speakers warned, the health consequences can be significant.

The forum heard that many families want to live on their homelands but can't, because of there is no adequate housing, roads and services.

Juli Cathcart, from Goŋ-D̲äl Aboriginal Corporation, said investment must be targeted towards places where people have cultural authority and responsibility.

"We are not asking governments to build houses anywhere or just everywhere," she said. "We are asking for very strategic investment in places where people belong, where cultural authority is clear, and where housing can deliver lasting benefits to families, community and Country."

For many communities, infrastructure is also critical to whether families can remain on Country year-round. Cathcart described roads that become impassable during the wet season, forcing families to move to larger communities for months at a time.

She said this movement should not be seen as evidence that homelands are unviable. "Rather it reflects decades of policy and investment decisions that have prioritised funding larger townships over homelands," she said.

The forum also explored the economic potential of strong homelands. Speakers pointed to ranger programs, fisheries, food production, art and cultural tourism as examples of economic activity grounded in knowledge and connection to Country.

Glenda Abraham, speaking from the perspective of Laynhapuy, said homelands have demonstrated their ability to build sustainable economies and govern themselves.

"Fifty years ago, Yolŋu stood up and walked home to their homelands," she said. "To do so, they had to make roads, build airstrips, build houses, build schools, employ young teachers, build clinics."

Her message was not simply for more funding, but for a different approach to how existing funding is allocated. "We're not asking for more money. We're asking for a different thought process to the way it is actually managed," she said.

Across the forum, speakers returned to the same central message: homelands need to be recognised as an important and viable part of Aboriginal life in the Northern Territory.

As one speaker put it, the goal is simple: "Healthy homelands, healthy people."

For those who spoke at the forum, supporting homelands means supporting people to live on Country, maintain cultural authority, care for land and sea, raise children, build local economies, and pass knowledge between generations.

The challenge now is turning that message into long-term policy, infrastructure and investment that allows homelands to remain strong for generations to come.

Out and about: We're all reading *Land Rights News!*

















Subscribe to LAND RIGHTS NEWS

Subscribe to Australia's longest-running Aboriginal newspaper, telling stories from remote Aboriginal lands from across the Northern Territory. Land Rights News is a free publication.

Scan the QR code or visit **nlc.org.au** and click on the 'News and Publications' tab.



Preparing for the worst weather: northern voices at national summit

TWO Northern Land Council members took the experiences of remote Top End communities to Canberra in September, sharing with a national audience what four disasters in one wet season looked like on the ground.

Lorraine Jones, NLC Deputy Chair, and Christopher Neade, NLC Executive Member, spoke at the National Emergency Management Agency's 2026 National Preparedness Summit in September. The two-day event brought together government agencies, emergency services, local government and community organisations to strengthen readiness for future emergencies.

The NLC presented on First Nations experiences. They presented together with Brian Pedwell from Victoria Daly Regional Council and James Woods from West Arnhem Regional Council: they spoke with one voice and shared many of the same concerns of their respective communities.

Ms Jones, from Timber Creek, and Mr Neade, from Elliott, spoke about how communities moved quickly from preparing, to responding, to recovering – sometimes within just a few weeks.

The message from the all the community leaders was clear: while the disasters were different , many of the challenges were the same. Communities became isolated, information did not always reach people, services were disrupted and families spent long periods away from Country.

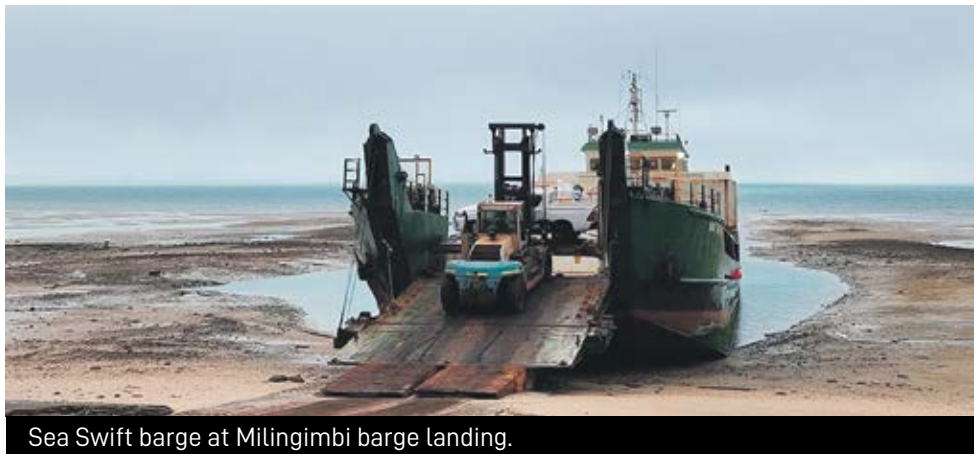
The community leaders called for practical action. "We are not seeking to take over emergency management", they told delegates, "but to build arrangements together with the NT Government, Fire and Emergency Services and NEMA before the next wet season."

In practice, this means strong local coordination before the wet season arrives, safe places on Country, communication in local languages, and culturally safe evacuation and recovery planning. Their message was simple: remote communities have valuable knowledge and must be part of planning before the next emergency arrives.



L to R: Brian Pedwell (Mayor, Victoria Daly Regional Council); Christopher Neade (NLC Executive Council Member); James Woods (Mayor, West Arnhem Regional Council); Governor-General, Lorraine Jones (NLC Deputy Chair); Yvette Williams (Deputy Mayor, Victoria Daly Regional Council).

Challenges in barge services in North East Arnhem Land



Sea Swift barge at Milingimbi barge landing.

IN late July, the Yurrwi (Milingimbi) community had trouble with the barge service that brings food and goods from Darwin.

For a week, the barge could not leave the coastline because of challenging landing infrastructure, and shallow seabed conditions. After that, there were temporary changes to the barge service, which impacted Yurrwi residents and community service organisations.

Barge services to remote communities are challenging due to remoteness, conditions of barge landings, king tides and seabed conditions.

Barge services are a lifeline to remote communities, keeping remote communities connected, supplying fuel, medical supplies, perishable food, and essential goods and services to customers across vast distances, often in challenging conditions.

The National Indigenous Australians Agency facilitated a working group with the Arnhem Land Progress Association (ALPA), the Northern Territory Department of Logistics and Infrastructure, and the Northern Land Council. The group discussed food security in Milingimbi, including both short- and long-term solutions.

Sea Swift has told government agencies about its concerns with the infrastructure at Milingimbi. It wants immediate dredging at the Milingimbi landing site to ensure long-term, reliable barge access and to make sure the community has food security.

There were challenges at first, but Sea Swift has maintained a regular weekly service to the Milingimbi since September, using a smaller, specialised vessel operating from Darwin.

All the organisations on the working group have agreed it is importance to maintain regular barge services to Milingimbi, to work together and to make stores and supply chains more resilient.

NLC Chair Matthew Ryan urges the stakeholders to prioritise ensuring food security for the community.

"Many remote communities in the NT rely on barge services all year round, but particularly during the wet season when roads are closed due to flooding", Chair Ryan said

"For island communities like Milingimbi, barge is the only way food, fuel and large goods are delivered to service providers like the ALPA store, East Arnhem Regional Council, the clinic and rangers.

"When barge services are reduced, it is the community who miss out."

Djambarrpuyŋu clan leader and president of East Arnhem Regional Council Lapuluŋ Dhamarrandji is concerned about community members.

"We want to be treated equally. We are not second-class people", Mr Dhamarrandji said

Sea Swift Acting Chief Operating Officer Todd Pemble says Sea Swift remains fully committed to supplying the Yurrwi (Milingimbi) community.

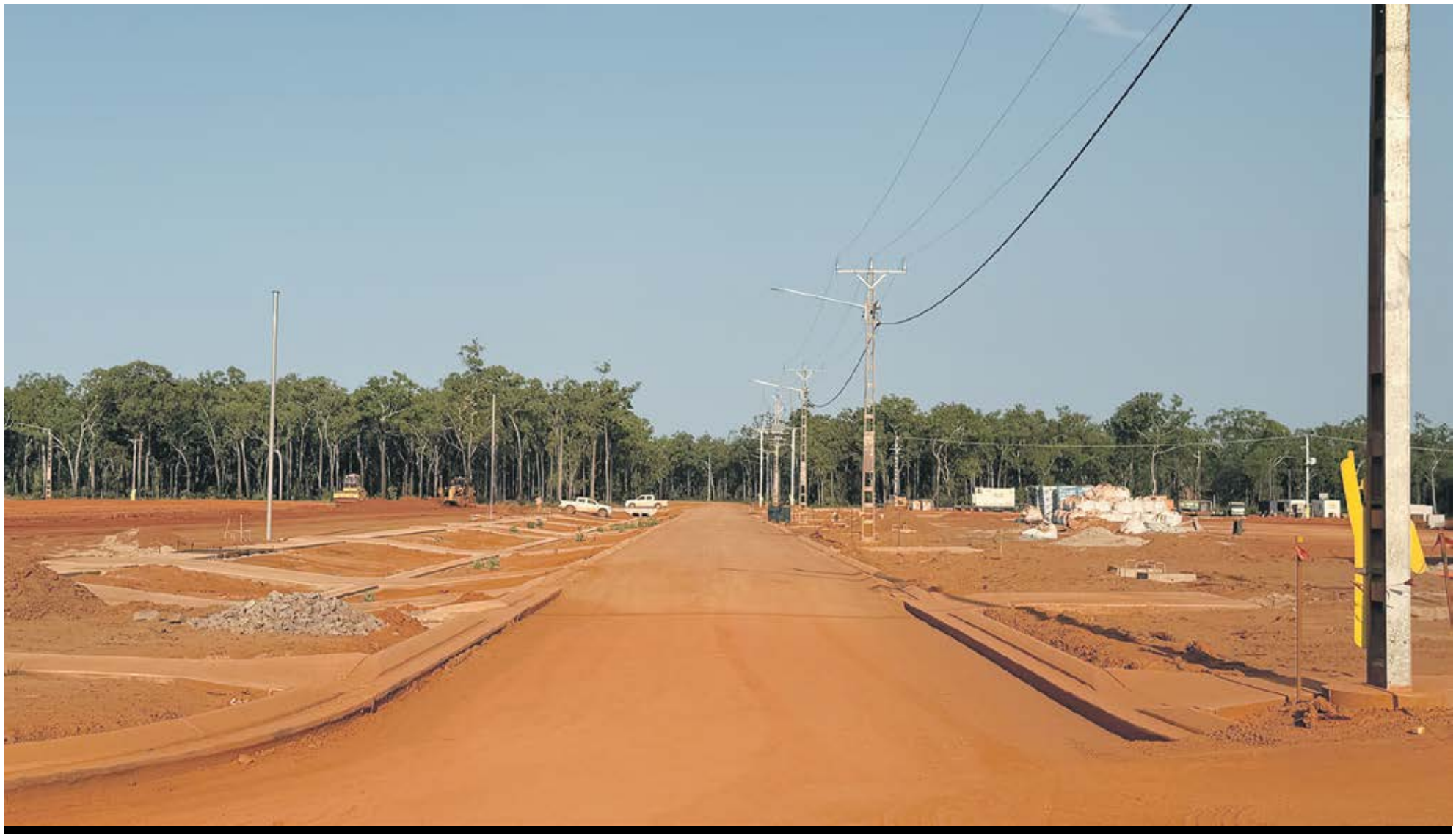
"Our strong preference is to deliver as often as possible, but our service is severely affected by local marine conditions. Reliable barge access is hindered by deteriorating marine landing infrastructure and shallow seabed conditions, which strictly limit safe vessel navigation during lower tides", Mr Pemble said

"Long-term food security for Milingimbi cannot be guaranteed without urgent government action – specifically dredging at the landing site to ensure safe, year-round access across all tide cycles," he said.

"Sea Swift remains eager to work constructively alongside key partners, including the Northern Land Council (NLC), local Aboriginal corporations, and all levels of government, to secure the critical infrastructure upgrades the Milingimbi community urgently needs.

"To safeguard community supply in the interim, Sea Swift has proactively deployed a dedicated, smaller vessel operating direct from Darwin at a significantly higher operational cost absorbed entirely by Sea Swift."

Remote housing funding dispute



New subdivision underway in Milingimbi community.

The Northern Territory Government wants to renegotiate the $4 billion NT Remote Housing Agreement. This could mean less homes are built and the NT doesn't reach its goal of halving overcrowding by 2034.

TWO years into the 10-year agreement, the NT and Commonwealth governments disagree about what the $4 billion should pay for, and how many homes will be built in remote communities across the NT.

The 10-year agreement, signed in 2024, aims to halve overcrowding and deliver up to 2,700 homes in remote NT communities, improving living conditions for Aboriginal families.

In recent months, the NT Government has tried to renegotiate the agreement to use some of the existing funding for program management and land servicing costs, such as new subdivisions. This would mean less money to build houses during the program.

In August, the Commonwealth Minister for Indigenous Australians Malarndirri McCarthy told federal parliament the NT Government wanted to reduce the number of homes they build down to 1,800, or even 1,100.

Minister McCarthy said that negotiations with the NT Government were continuing. There is a review of the agreement underway, to work out how to progress the program.

"We are willing to continue to sit down at the table to look at other alternatives with the Northern Territory Government," Minister McCarthy told ABC Radio Alice Springs.

However, the long-term number of houses to be built under this program is a key point of disagreement.

NT Housing and Aboriginal Affairs Minister Steve Edgington has said that construction, freight, fuel and labour are all getting more expensive, and so are the costs of connecting remote housing blocks to power, water and sewerage.

He said preparing a block for construction could cost between $300,000 and $600,000, adding to the financial pressures facing the program.

Minister McCarthy has said Minister Edgington told both the Commonwealth and the Aboriginal members of the Joint Steering Committee that the NT Government was not asking for more money.

Minister McCarthy said program management costs should not come out of the agreement, and that land servicing was not expected to be part of it.

The Aboriginal members of the Joint Steering Committee, which oversees this 10-year program, are concerned.

The Joint Steering Committee includes representatives from Aboriginal Housing Northern Territory (AHNT), the Northern Land Council (NLC), Central Land Council (CLC), Tiwi Land Council and Anindilyakwa Land Council, alongside the two levels of government.

The Joint Steering Committee was set up to give Aboriginal organisations a formal role in decision-making, and to help make sure housing investment reflects the needs of remote communities.

Land councils and AHNT stand together in calling for governments to not walk away from halving overcrowding in remote communities.

NLC Chair Matthew Ryan said reducing the number of homes was not acceptable, and both governments need to work together on the remote housing program.

"We want to see as many homes delivered – that's a responsibility of both governments", Chair Ryan said.

"We can't afford to drop the ball on housing. It is people on the ground who will pay the price. We were promised up to 2,700 and if we don't hit that target another generation of our kids will grow up in overcrowded houses.

"Both governments need to work together to make sure funding is spent the right way."

NT and Commonwealth governments are negotiating on the targets and management of the program through a two-year review process.

Reducing the number of houses will directly impact whether the NT meets Closing the Gap targets.

Health, school attendance, youth training and employment are just some of the things affected by overcrowding.

NLC Chair Ryan is worried reducing the numbers of homes will compromise the standards of living of people living in remote communities, forcing them to live in overcrowed conditions for longer.

"Every house that doesn't get built sends a message to all Aboriginal people living in overcrowded communities – that they don't matter", he said.

"Every house that doesn't get built is a family that keeps waiting. People in our communities have waited long enough."

Jingili-Mudburra Native Title Holders bring benefits from Beetaloo to the Barkly



Left to Right: Ben Ulamari, Claudette Albert, Rosemary Raymond and Jeremy Jackson with Jeremy's nephew at Shenandoah South site.

The Appraisal Gas Agreement between Native Title Holders and Tamboran Resources Corporation has brought gas supply to the Darwin and Katherine regions since September.

AT the end of 2024, Jingili-Mudburra Native Title Holders consented to the sale of appraisal or "test" gas extracted from the Beetaloo Basin by Tamboran for three years.

The Northern Land Council (NLC) supported Native Title Holders through negotiations with Tamboran to reach the agreement, which will see jobs and benefits flow.

Traditional Owners want an active role in what happens on their Country, and are looking forward to growth and investment in local communities and in the township of Elliott.

Native Title Holder Rosemary Raymond said she wants a better future for the next generation.

"Elliott is a forgotten town," she said. "We need a better future for our children."

The negotiations took more than two years, to make sure the agreement delivers real improvements to living standards and economic development opportunities for Elliott, Marlinja (Newcastle Waters) and other nearby outstations.

For Native Title Holder Ben Ulamari, the agreement with Tamboran will make sure Native Title Holders can benefit. "With this project, we are making sure our culture is respected and our people are not forgotten."

"We are forgotten by government after government. We just want to make sure our kids get good education, work opportunities and services, like all Australians," he said.

Mr Ulamari owns a contracting business that has been given work contracts with Tamboran, bringing local jobs to the region.

Native Title Holder Jeremy Jackon said they are working with Tamboran so they can see investment in their communities. "We want to see skills training and job opportunities for our Traditional Owners and local mob."

NLC Chair Matthew Ryan said that working with Traditional Owners is key for economic growth for the whole Northern Territory. "Native Title Holders are supporting growth in the Territory," he said.

"We need to ensure that places like Elliott and the Barkly reap the benefits of this agreement, such as improved living standards, roads and services."

The NLC will continue to administer the agreement on behalf of Native Title Holders to make sure Tamboran meets its obligations.

The Barkly is home to a proud and rich Aboriginal culture kept alive by Traditional Owners.

Building Career Pathways in West Arnhem

NORTHERN Land Council's Learning and Development team joined the West Arnhem Careers Expo roadshow during the first week of September, visiting Warruwi, Minjilang and Jabiru. Different team members attended different locations across the three days, ensuring the NLC had a presence at each event. They were there with other employers, training providers and community organisations.

The weather was warming up, but many students and community members came to chat about career pathways and future plans. The NLC stall was a crowd favourite, with many students stopping to grab brochures and the ever-popular NLC merchandise. For the NLC team, it was a great way to start conversations and connect with young people.

Many of the students were in Years 9 and 10, giving the team an opportunity to talk about work experience and the different pathways available through the NLC. Discussions covered traineeships, cadetships, internships, graduate programs and casual employment, as well as the wide variety of roles across the organisation.

Organised by Arnhem Land Progress Association (ALPA), the roadshow also provided a great chance to connect with other organisations travelling together across the region. It was valuable to learn more about the programs and services they offer and to explore opportunities to work together in the future. In addition to the NLC, there were representatives from a wide range of sectors including health, defence, Northern Territory Government, and tourism.

According to organiser, Gabrielle Maquill from ALPA, the West Arnhem Careers Expo was an incredibly rewarding experience for all who attended. "The feedback we've received from attendees has been overwhelmingly positive", Ms Maquill told Land Rights News. "Through our engagement with communities, we know just how important it is for young people on Country to see clearly what pathways are available to them. We love working alongside stakeholders to create more opportunities for community members to explore employment, training and career pathways."



NLC staff Ashley Damala and Sonny Wauchope at the West Arnhem Careers Expo in Warruwi

Water is life: Learning on Country builds skills and strong futures

Across North East Arnhem Land and the Gulf of Carpentaria, rivers, coastlines, wetlands and Sea Country are places of learning as well as culture, work and responsibility.



Learning on Country students in Galiwinku.



Learning on Country students in Galiwinku.

THROUGH the Learning on Country Program, students are building practical skills while strengthening their knowledge of Country. Learning alongside Elders, Traditional Owners and rangers, this year students have done everything from maritime training and collecting marine rubbish, to pearling and cultural art. Each activity connects education to the places students know: along the coast, on Sea Country, and beside the waterways that shape life in their communities.

In Galiwin'ku, that connection is opening pathways into maritime work. Fifteen students are enrolled in the maritime program this year, learning the skills needed to operate boats safely and confidently on Sea Country.

Learning on Country Coordinator at Shepherdson College, Isaac Jansens, said the program was continuing to build on strong results from last year.

"Four students completed their Coxswain Grade 3 qualifications last year, and another five are on track to complete theirs this year," Mr Jansens said.

Three students who got their Coxswain qualification last year have already taken their skills beyond the classroom. They recently completed a week of work experience with local rangers, operating the rangers' barge and other boats, and putting their skills into practice.

Maritime program students also took part in a careers day at Dhipirri Barra Lodge, where they learned about employment opportunities in their communities.

One Year 11 student has already got paid work after going to the careers day.

"One of our Coxswain qualification holders has just been employed part-time following her week of work experience," Mr Jansens said. "She is a confident and competent operator of our school vessel [boat], and her job with the rangers will include operating their 11-metre barge to transport freight and resources to homelands within the Marthakal IPA."

Later this year, students are expected to complete their final maritime training block in collaboration with the Gumurr Marthakal Rangers and a Sea Shepherd marine rubbish campaign. They will focus on on removing ghost nets and other marine rubbish from the Wessel Islands.

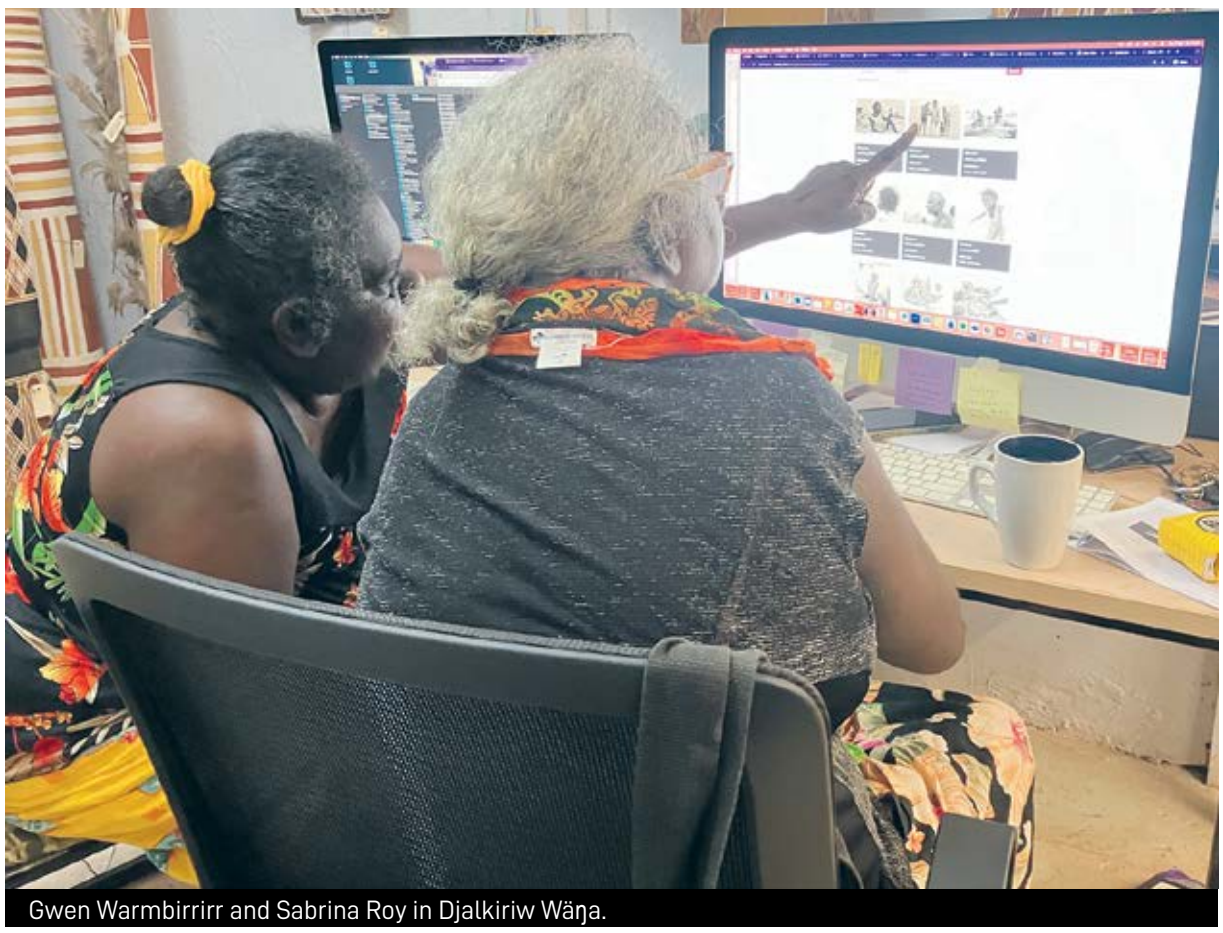
Mr Jansens said the school was also looking ahead to the next group of students. They are planning a day trip to Nhulunbuy swimming pool later this year to welcome next year's maritime group and give students an opportunity to complete their swimming skills requirements.

Further south, Makarrata students from Laynhapuy Homelands School are exploring how Sea Country can support sustainable industries and future employment.

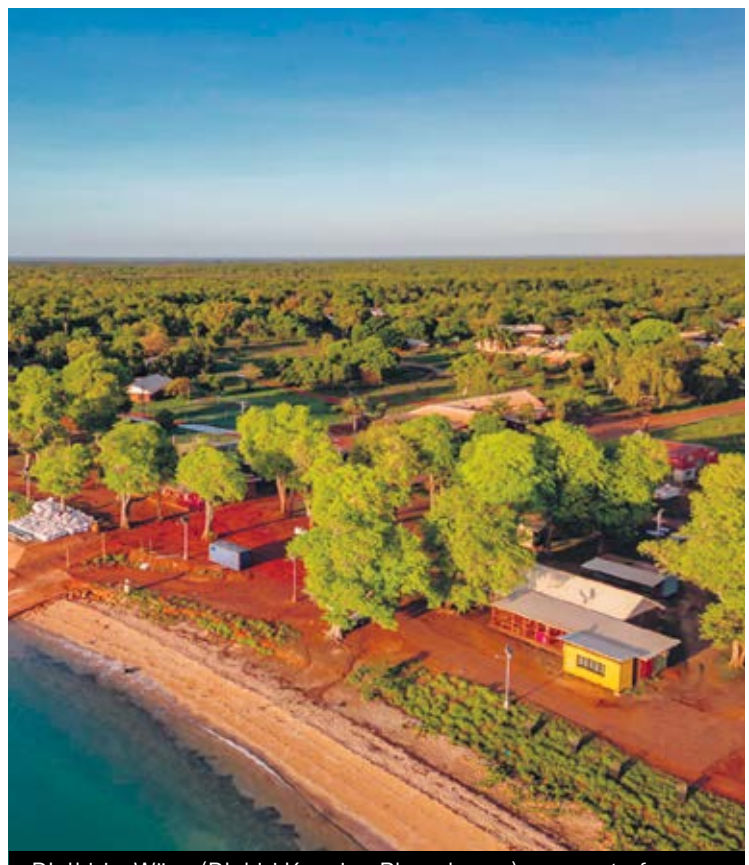
During semester 1, students visited Clipper Pearl Farm at Maram (Dholdji), where they were introduced to the different stages of pearl farming and helped with some of the work . They also learnt about workplace safety, teamwork and sustainable industry practices.

The visit connected classroom learning with a working marine enterprise, giving students practical experience while showing how marine business can operate alongside care for Sea Country. It also introduced possible pathways into further training and employment, linking local knowledge with opportunities close to home.

Djalkiri Keeping Place caring for history



Gwen Warmbirrirr and Sabrina Roy in Djalkiriw Wäŋa.



Djalkiriw Wäŋa (Djakiri Keeping Place home) on coast of Milingimbi. Credit: Charlie Bliss.

Djalkiri Keeping Place has been bringing back the history of the clans that call Milingimbi home, sharing it with Yolŋu people of Milingimbi and surrounding homelands.

Yolŋu now have better access to the knowledge of their Old People through Djalkiri Wäŋa, the Djalkiri Database.

If you are Yolŋu, you will know that djalkiri means "foot", "footprints", "roots" or "foundations". It means to look to the foundations of the past to teach us how to move forward.

On the coast of Milingimbi, a yellow, air-conditioned donga houses the history of Milingimbi at Djalkiri Keeping Place.

Djalkiri Keeping Place is giving easier and safer access to Yolŋu through Djalkiri Wäŋa, where Yolŋu can search through artworks, images, and recordings that document community history, and Yolŋu cultural material and practice.

The database uses Yolŋu foundational concepts such as gurruṯu (kinship) in local languages, documenting relationships between Yolŋu (people), bäpurru (clan) and wäŋa (place).

By using this database, Yolŋu in Yurrwi (Milingimbi) and surrounding homelands are reclaiming authority over artefacts and images of their history that were taken from their ancestors.

Djalkiri Keeping Place is a living community archive that works to digitally return artworks, objects and images, reconnecting Yolŋu with their documented cultural heritage, and supporting community access to and authority of these collections. It's built on the foundation of Milingimbi's strong artistic and cultural legacy, and was created at the request of the board at Milingimbi Art and Culture.

To date, Djalkiri Keeping Place has repatriated over 25,000 images of artworks, objects, people and places from about 80 locations across the world.

All materials go through cultural processes with appropriate senior Yolŋu to make sure the stories and images are open and safe for everyone to look at, while records and spelling are corrected according to Yolŋu knowledge.

Already, Djalkiri Wäŋa is being well used by the community. Artists are finding relevant historic artworks from their family lines that help reinvigorate cultural knowledge, and important stories of places and songlines. People also come to look at photos of their families, to remember their Old People and the Old Ways[EM1.1]. With permission, people ask for copies of photos for bäpurru (funerals), or to take home and show families.

With the guidance of the Djägamirr Mala (the Caretaker and Advisory Board made up of senior men and women), Djalkiri Keeping Place is helping Yolŋu learn from their history, and stand strong on Yolŋu foundations.

Gwen Warmbirrirr has been working in Djalkiri Keeping Place for three years. She does archiving djäma (work), looking at old photos to identify people, places and clan groups so they can be searched within Djalkiri Wäŋa. Warmbirrirr says this helps Yolŋu people identify the images of their ancestors and family in the old days.

"I think it's really interesting for Yolŋu people in this community [Milingimbi]," she said.

"They [Milingimbi community members] said that it's a good thing that we have Djalkiri Keeping Place to keep all those old photos with us. They said it helps them to trace their way back to the mission days, pre-mission days of their family travels.

"A lot of Yolŋu have been using Djalkiri when they have funerals; they always come to Djalkiri and ask to find photo[s] of their family. They don't know what their grandfather or great grandfather looks like. They come to Djalkiri Keeping Place, we search for photos on the computer, find them, and then make a copy of the pictures and give it to them."

Senior men work closely with Djalkiri Keeping Place to ensure artworks, their stories and relationships are recorded correctly, and cultural protocols are followed.

Leonard Bowayngu said it is important for Yolŋu knowledge.

"Djalkiri is our past, our connection, our identity," he said. "Djalkiri is our knowledge. We know our djalkiri, every artist does. We respect the boundaries and areas of our Country – the songlines teach the relationships between Yolŋu, between clans, kinship, and places.".

Ruth Nalmakarra, a previous Chair of Milingimbi Art and Culture, has been instrumental in the repatriation of historical digital images of life and artworks back to their places of origin.

She said that Djalkiri was established so the Art Centre can look after the old photos, stories and artworks, allowing young and old people, both Yolŋu and Balanda, to look and learn.

"Djalkiri is important because it holds the records of the past, and of the old and middle-age artists," Nalmakarra said. "These include paintings, photos and recordings that are valuable for the future.

"Our Yolŋu law is here at Djalkiri."

"Djalkiri is for Yolŋu, djamarrkuḻi [children] and bukmak [everyone], to sit with us and learn with us. Djalkiri is the foundation of our old people, to continue teaching djamarrkuḻi and those beyond djamarrkuḻi."

Jacinta Burukumalawuy, who also works in Djalkiri Keeping Place, has been helping to explain what Djalkiri is and does, and why it's important, to institutions around Australia. Her advocacy work is vital in teaching about Yolŋu protocols and culture.

Djalkiri staff are working to increase the number of collections accessible through the database, especially collections of importance to the community. This ongoing work with senior knowledge holders and the wider community is vital for building the foundations for future generations to stand and learn on.

Yiwarr McGrath wins seat for Mulka

Yiwarr McGrath is the newly elected Member for Mulka, after winning the September by-election.

A Yolŋu man, registered nurse and father of three daughters, Yiwarr will be giving up his nursing djäma (work) to represent Yolŋu and Balanda living in North East Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory Parliament.

Yiwarr grew up at Mata Mata on the coast of North East Arnhem Land, where he attended the school where his mother and grandmother both taught. He received much of his early cultural education at Djiliwirri estate, which belongs to the Gupapuyŋu clan. He was raised there by his aunty and her husband, Gupapuyŋu man Yitirri Gaykamangu (deceased).

Yiwarr later moved to Galiwin'ku, before moving to Canberra as a teenager to continue his schooling. He later returned to the Territory and studied in Darwin.

Yiwarr's decision to work in health was influenced by his mother's experience. As a child, he saw her struggle to get a diagnosis and treatment, with language barriers affecting her care. This helped shape his approach to healthcare: he makes sure patients can explain their concerns and be understood.

He went on to become an Aboriginal Health Practitioner and later the first Yolŋu registered nurse. Working in community clinics, he helped patients understand their health and make informed decisions about their care.

Alongside nursing, he has contributed to research at Menzies School of Health Research to improve communication between Aboriginal patients and health professionals. He also helped produce the Ask the Specialist podcast, which shares Aboriginal knowledge and experiences with healthcare workers. In 2021, he was named the NT Young Australian of the Year.

He is passionate about education and encouraging young First Nations people to go into careers in nursing and medicine.

As the Member for Mulka, Yiwarr's priorities are: more housing, reliable healthcare, better roads and local jobs, while making sure Yolŋu people have a say in decisions affecting their communities.



Yiwarr visiting North East Arnhem Land communities during the election campaign.



Drifting Clouds wins big at this year's NIMAs

Yolŋu band Drifting Clouds are going from strength to strength; playing shows around the country and, most recently, winning Best New Talent at the National Indigenous Music Awards (NIMAs).



Drifting Clouds (photo credit: Zac Terry).

HAILING from the homelands of Bunhungura near Gapuwiyak, Drifting Clouds are getting lots of attention from local, national and global audiences.

Following the release of two hit singles, 'Bawuypawuy' (in 2025) and 'Rarrandharr' (in 2026), the band has played sold-out shows at the Sydney Opera House, Melbourne, Broome, Darwin and Kalkarindji.

Lead singer and the creative force behind the project, Terry Guyula said that winning the Best New Talent at this year's NIMAs was a "complete surprise".

"I didn't know that we were going to win. I turned up late and everyone was looking for me," Mr Guyula said. "I was freaking out."

He said being able to share his stories with familiar and new audiences has been the best part of the past couple of years.

"People don't always know who we are, and it's good that they come and listen to my story," he said.

"I wanna keep sharing. My grandfather was a storyteller and so was my father. So now it's important that I do this and tell my stories to the world."

Drifting Clouds were also nominated for Song of the Year and Film Clip of the Year for their hit 2025 hit, 'Bawuypawuy'.

"It made me really proud that we have won this award," Mr Guyula said.

Mr Guyula said now, the focus was on getting their first album out.

"It's hard because I have to go between Darwin and Gapuwiyak for family or for funerals. But the album is slowly getting there," he said.

Yung Milla uses Voice win to create opportunities for Darwin youth



Yung Milla wins on The Voice.

Marranunggu rapper Yung Milla has made history as the first rapper and first Aboriginal performer to win The Voice Australia, but the Darwin artist says his $100,000 prize is about more than personal success.

SPEAKING on social media following the win, Yung Milla said the achievement belonged to the people who had supported him.

"This is bigger than me. I haven't won ... everybody where I'm from has won, all my mob has won," he said.

Yung Milla, also known as Levi Nichaloff, won the 2026 competition after a standout run during which he brought his music, culture and story to millions of Australians. His victory was celebrated by hundreds of family members, friends and supporters at a community watch party in Palmerston on Larrakia Country.

The $100,000 prize will first go towards supporting his mother, Kylie Miller, before he works towards another goal: establishing an affordable recording studio in Darwin for young people.

"This journey means so much more than music, it's about making my people proud and showing what's possible," said Milla. The vision is rooted in Yung Milla's professional experience as a mentor to young Aboriginal people in the Territory.

His next chapter is already underway. In early October, Yung Milla released a new single. 'Lethal', to rave reviews. This was followed by energetic performances supporting Kid Ink in North Queensland a few days later. He has also recently released his version of 'Land Down Under', which he performed as part of The Voice semi-finals.

For Yung Milla, the national spotlight is an opportunity to create a pathway for others to follow.

Yolŋu stories celebrated at Territory and national literary awards

Yolŋu storytelling has been celebrated on both the Northern Territory and national stage, with a number of Aboriginal writers and storytellers recognised at the 2026 Northern Territory Writing Awards and Prime Minister's Literary Awards.



Image (L-R): 2026 NT Writing Awards finalists Darren McCallum, Ryanna Clayton, Sophie Benkemoun, Roland Bull, Leonie Norrington, Kylie Gatjawarrawuy Mununggurr, Merrkiyawuy Ganambarr-Stubbs, Vamshika Bakshi, Julie Marcus, Eric Daams, Kathie Rea. Photo Charlie Bliss.

THE biggest success came for A Piece of Red Cloth, a collaborative novel by Leonie Norrington, Djawundil Maymuru, Merrkiyawuy Ganambarr-Stubbs and Djawa Burarrwanga. The book won Best Fiction at the 2026 NT Book Awards, before taking out the Fiction category at the 2026 Prime Minister's Literary Awards.

Based on Yolŋu oral history from North East Arnhem Land, A Piece of Red Cloth tells the story of Batjani, a grandmother determined to protect her granddaughter during encounters with Macassan trepang fishermen. The Prime Minister's Literary Awards judges described the book as a significant work of collaboration between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal writers, drawing on oral history and deep cultural knowledge.

For Ms Norrington, who grew up in Barunga, the recognition also highlights the importance of bringing Yolŋu histories and perspectives to wider audiences.

Other Yolŋu writers were also recognised at the NT Book Awards. Kylie Gatjawarrawuy Mununggurr won Best Children's/Young Adult for *Raymaŋgirrbuy dhäwu When I was a little girl*, while the shortlist also included On the Way to Yalaŋbara by Rärriwuy Gurramu Marika and Merrkiyawuy Ganambarr-Stubbs, and Gulun' by the children of Yirrkala School.

The awards are an opportunity to celebrate not only individual writers, but the strength of storytelling across generations and the role of books in carrying culture, history, language and knowledge forward.

With Aboriginal writers from across the Territory continuing to gain recognition, this year's awards highlight the growing national audience for stories grounded in Country and told through Aboriginal perspectives.

CHILD PROTECTION

If welfare (child protection/Department of Children and Families) gets involved with your family,

call a lawyer.

New laws started 31 August 2026

CALL A LAWYER EARLY

Central Australia	Darwin	Katherine & Big Rivers
NAAJA 1800 636 079	NAAJA 1800 898 251	NAAJA 1800 897 728
CAWLS 1800 684 055	NAAFLS 1800 041 998	NAAFLS 1800 041 998
Legal Aid NT 1800 019 343	Legal Aid NT 1800 019 343	KWILS 1800 620 108
CAAFLU 1800 088 884		Legal Aid NT 1800 019 343

NAAJA DIGNITY · RESPECT · JUSTICE
NAAFLS NORTH AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL FAMILY LEGAL SERVICE
Legal Aid NT
CAWLS Women's Legal Service
CAAFLU 1800 088 884
Darwin Community LEGAL SERVICE
KWILS KATHERINE WOMEN'S LEGAL SERVICE
Top End Women's Legal Service

Freedom Day Festival honours 60 years of resilience

The Freedom Day Festival at Kalkarindji brought people together on Gurindji Country in August to celebrate 60 years since the Wave Hill Walk-Off and honour the strength, resilience and determination of the people whose actions helped shape the history of land rights in the Northern Territory.

NORTHERN Land Council Chair Matthew Ryan was there and spoke of the deeply personal significance of the occasion. "My father was taken from here also, part of the Stolen Generation from Limbunya Station. I'm still trying to reconnect." Chair Ryan's father was taken to Croker Island, leaving him to make the journey of reconnecting with his family and Country.

The festival marks an important and serious event in our history, but it is also a vibrant and happy celebration of the courage and resilience of the Gurindji people. On the festival mainstage Jimmy Barnes, Drifting Clouds, B2M and Tjupi Band provided an impressive musical line-up. And on the fields and courts, Territory athletes showcased their skills at the all-day AFL and basketball competitions.

For Chair Ryan, the Freedom Day celebration was ultimately about unity and recognising the continuing strength of Aboriginal people. "The importance of Wave Hill walk-off that eventually led to the creation of land rights in the Territory, in 1976, cannot be underestimated," Chair Ryan said.

"Today is a celebration of unity, not silos," he said, acknowledging the Gurindji, Mudburra, Warlpiri people, and many other families and clans whose struggles and determination continue to shape the story of Aboriginal rights.



Northern Land Council Chair, Matthew Ryan, at the 2026 Freedom Day Festival March.

Gattjirrk Festival

Yurrwi (Milingimbi) community celebrated culture, music and life at the Gattjirrk festival.


Shellie Morris leads a songwriting workshop for the children at Gatjirrk Festival, Milingimbi.

IN early September, Yolŋu in Yurrwi joined in celebration of music, dance, culture and community at the annual Gattjirrk Festival.

Djambarrpuyŋu clan leader Keith Lapuluŋ opened the festival, which was filled with live music and dancing. The festival started with a Friday evening cane toad bust. Children and families walked the streets of Yurrwi to collect the most cane toads for a prize.

On Saturday, rangers started the day early, setting up a traditional ground oven and cooking buffalo meat for the community.

Shellie Morris AO worked with Mr Lapuluŋ and other local elders Elizabeth Ganygulpa and Tony Batju from Wirrinyga Band to run a songwriting workshop with djamarrkuḻi' (children). Later that evening, the children sang the new song at the festival.

Gattjirrk Festival first started as a music, sound and lighting competition in 1982 to celebrate life.

Mr Lapuluŋ says it began out of the spirit of bringing people from different camps and clans together.

"When we started, people didn't get along. All the camps [in Milingimbi] didn't interact together as a community – coming together.

"Bottom camp was bottom camp, top camp was top camp, army camp was army camp.

"The essence of the Gattjirrk festival is about helping the community to stand, to thrive and rise. It's about coming together with the spirit of totality, oneness, to run the festival where we have the yindi (big) heart."

Today, more than four decades on, the festival's purpose is to celebrate life, country, community and culture in Yurrwi.

Sport roundup: Celebrating Sport on Country

Arnhem Crows women make it six premierships



Arnhem Crows AFL team after winning their 6th premiership

The Arnhem Crows women have once again proven why they are one of the strongest teams in the Big Rivers Football League. They won their sixth premiership title in September, and continue a remarkable legacy built on pride, determination and community spirit.

The victory is the fourth Big Rivers Football League women's premiership in a row, marking another historic milestone for the club. It's a testament to the hard work, commitment and resilience shown by the players throughout the season.

Players from Barunga, Wugularr, Beswick and surrounding communities are part of the Arnhem Crows team, built on friendship, respect and a shared love of football.

Throughout the season, teams and players travel from across the region, including Darwin and other communities, to compete and be part of the Big Rivers competition.

For Arnhem Crows Sporting Association President Helen Lee, the success of the women's team is about much more than football.

"It's about making a difference in people's lives, particularly our young people, and giving them opportunities to be part of something positive," she said.

Since the women's team was established in 2020, it has become one of the most successful sides in the competition, winning six premierships in seven seasons and inspiring the next generation of female footballers.

"Behind every premiership cup is a story of sacrifice, determination, commitment and resilience," Ms Lee said.

"These women are mothers, daughters, sisters and aunties. They are showing our younger girls that, no matter where you come from, you can achieve great things if you have determination, commitment and people who believe in you."

Many players balance football with family responsibilities, work and community commitments, often travelling long distances to train and compete.

Ms Lee also paid tribute to two players who have been part of every premiership-winning team since the women's side was formed.

"Georgina Runyu and Trephina Bush have been part of all six women's premierships since the team was established. Their loyalty, dedication and contribution to our club will forever be part of Arnhem Crows history."

Beyond the premierships, she believes the team's greatest achievement is the positive example they set for young girls across the region. The Arnhem Crows continue to play an important role in bringing communities together, creating opportunities for young people and promoting values such as teamwork, leadership, respect and responsibility.

"Our club is a place of belonging. It's where families come together, friendships are built, young people are encouraged and our communities are united", Ms Lee said.

"When I look back on my journey with the Arnhem Crows, I don't just see premiership cups, football games or victories. I see the faces of our players, the sacrifices made by families, the dedication of our volunteers and the pride of our communities.

"We are a club built on the strength of our people. From Barunga and Wugularr to our surrounding communities, we come together under one guernsey, with one purpose and one shared pride."

With six premierships now in the trophy cabinet, and a new generation inspired by their success, the Arnhem Crows women continue to make history both on and off the field.

Congratulations to the Arnhem Crows women on bringing the Big Rivers Grand Final trophy home once again.

NT teams shine at National Indigenous Tennis Carnival

More than 60 young players from across the Northern Territory took part in the National Indigenous Tennis Carnival in Darwin in August. Nine NT teams representing communities, schools and homelands including East Arnhem, the Tiwi Islands, Groote Archipelago, Jilkminggan, Jabiru and the Utopia region. Palmerston 1 took out the Red Ball competition, while Tony Kerinaiua from the Tiwi Islands was named the NT Deadly Award winner for his sportsmanship, kindness and encouragement of his fellow players.

Tennis takes to the Big Rivers

Tennis NT continued its work across the Big Rivers region in August, visiting Jilkminggan, Mataranka, Pine Creek and Katherine for school programs, community training and social tennis. St Joseph's Catholic College won the Big Rivers Red Ball Gala Day, while four local community members completed official tennis training, supporting the development of sustainable tennis opportunities in regional communities. More than 70 students also took part in sessions at Katherine High School, Macfarlane Primary School and Pine Creek School.

AFLW Dreamtime match

AFLW teams Essendon and Richmond battled it out in Darwin on August 30, as part of the Dreamtime in Darwin series – a special celebration of AFLW, culture and community at TIO Stadium. Richmond defeated Essendon by five points. Returning to Darwin for the third year in a row, the match is a key fixture on the NT's premier sporting calendar.

New basketball courts for Kybrook and Weemol

It's a road to healthier communities for Kybrook and Weemol, with both places recently opening their new basketball courts. With support from Aboriginal Investment NT, Kybrook community now has a multi-purpose space that will be used for basketball, other sports, recreation and community meetings. And, in Weemol, the Bulman and Weemol communities celebrated the opening of their new facility with a community barbecue on October 8, and basketball clinic led by former Australian opal and WNBL player Deanna Black. The new facility was funded by Roper Gulf Regional Council and SLS Builders.



Clare Merritt from Many Rivers with Lance Ashley Community Coordinator, Kybrook Community Aboriginal Corporation at the new basketball court with the team from Aboriginal Investment NT.

Kurrung Carnival Unites Communities

MORE than 200 athletes from across Arnhem Land and the Top End travelled to Jabiru in August for the 2026 Kurrung Sports Carnival, for two days of football, basketball and community connection.

Held on 28-29 August, the carnival brought together men's and women's teams representing Minjilang, Maningrida, Gunbalanya, Warruwi, Numbulwar and Kakadu.

The basketball competitions kicked off at the Jabiru Sports Courts, with the Numbulwar Green Ants taking the women's title and the Jabiru Bombers winning the men's competition.

The action moved to Brockman Oval on Saturday for the men's AFL competition, where the Jabiru Bombers secured back-to-back premierships after defeating Warruwi Storm. The Bombers also won the women's AFL showcase against the Arnhem Land Wildfires.



Athletes from across Arnhem Land compete in the 2026 Kurrung Sports Carnival.

While competition was fierce, the carnival's significance extended beyond the scoreboard. West Arnhem Regional Council Mayor James Woods said Kurrung gave athletes an opportunity to represent their families and communities, with some participants having few opportunities to compete in major sporting carnivals throughout the year.

The Warruwi Storm were awarded the Spirit of Kurrung Cup for demonstrating respect, fair play and community spirit throughout the competition.

This year's carnival was particularly significant as it ran alongside the Mahbilil Festival for the first time since 2019, creating a weekend that brought sport, culture, music and community together in Jabiru.

For the participating communities, Kurrung remains an important opportunity to come together, celebrate local sporting talent and strengthen connections across the region.

Mahbilil Festival celebrates Kakadu culture in Jabiru



Crowds enjoy live performances at the Mahbilil Festival.



Exhibition artist Ivan Namarnyilk standing with his artwork.

MUSIC, dance, art, bush foods and culture took centre stage in Jabiru in August, as the Mahbilil Festival returned to celebrate Kakadu's rich cultural traditions.

Held on 28-29 August, the family-friendly festival coincided with the Kurrung Sports Carnival, bringing communities from across Kakadu and West Arnhem together for a weekend of celebration.

Named after the cooling afternoon breeze that arrives during the Kurrung season, Mahbilil reflects a time of regeneration and renewal in Kakadu, when the days are warm, the evenings are cooler and magpie geese move across the wetlands.

The 2026 program featured traditional dance, art, weaving, painting and spear-making workshops, market stalls, family activities, and a traditional ground oven showcasing bush foods including buffalo, barramundi and magpie goose.

The festival provided a platform for artists from the region and beyond. The evening program featured performances from Indigenous artists including Christine Anu, Shellie Morris AO B2M, Bininj Band, Nabarlek Band and Nathan Fejo.

An exhibition by artist Ivan Namarnyilk was also held at Marrawuddi Gallery, showcasing artwork connected to Country, culture and community.

It is the first time since 2019 that Mahbilil and Kurrung have been held together, creating a major weekend for Jabiru and the West Arnhem region.



BARRAMUNDI

ABOUT THE ARTWORK

This story depicts two barramundi swimming in water. Also visible are two waterlily yams. Water or "Gapu" is visualised by the coloured dots. Raark or fine line work has been completed using a handmade Jarlk brush harvested from local billabongs and wet areas.
This style is highly distinctive and often uses colors such as red and yellow oxide, titanium white and carbon black. The figurative depictions and patterns are deeply symbolic, representing stories and skin groups as well as cultural and spiritual beliefs passed down from ancestors. The use of brushes like the Jarlk brush, crafted from local billabong reeds, adds an extra layer of authenticity to the work, connecting the artists with the land and their heritage.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Fabian Sandy was born in Yirrkala in North East Arnhem Land and now lives in Beswick. He and his brother were taught to paint by their mother. Mr Sandy prefers to paint with a Jarlk grass reed brush and traditional bush colours in modern acrylics.

Mr Sandy generally paints saltwater stories on canvas or bark, and also carves and makes didjeridus. As well as being a visual artist, Fabian is a master didjeridu player and traditional dancer.



ARTIST
FABIAN SANDY

Homeland/ Country	Yirrkala. North East Arnhem Land
Skin	Gamarrang
Region	Wugularr(Beswick,) Katherine region