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Marking 50 years since Cyclone Tracy: Honouring resilience and reflecting on Darwin Airport's role in recovery

Throughout this month we have paused to remember a defining moment in Darwin's history – the devastation of Cyclone Tracy, which struck in the early hours on Christmas Day in 1974. This catastrophic event left an indelible mark on the city, claiming 71 lives, injuring more than 600 people and destroying nearly 80 per cent of the community.

Amidst the tragedy, Darwin International Airport emerged as a beacon of hope, becoming the heart of one of the largest airlift operations in Australian history. Over 5 days, more than 25,500 people, primarily women and children, were evacuated to safety aboard civilian and military aircraft.

Among the remarkable efforts, Qantas set a record by carrying 697 people on a single Boeing 747 flight, including 647 passengers and 23 crew members. Simultaneously, relief flights brought essential supplies, medical aid and rescue teams to the devastated city.

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of this pivotal event, Airport Development Group, in partnership with local film studio Global Headquarters, has released a compelling short documentary titled *More Than Just Being There*. The documentary was previewed at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory to invited guests.

More Than Just Being There shares personal stories from residents and highlights Darwin International Airport's critical role in supporting the city's recovery and reconnecting families.

Airport Development Group CEO Tony Edmondstone explained that Darwin Airport became a vital lifeline after Cyclone Tracy.

"This documentary honours the lives lost, the resilience of survivors, and the extraordinary efforts of those who came together in a time of immense need," he said.

"It's a tribute to the courage and determination that rebuilt a stronger Darwin."

The documentary underscores the importance of airports as critical hubs during disasters, uniting communities and providing essential support when it is needed most. In the wake of Cyclone Tracy, Darwin International Airport evolved its disaster preparedness capabilities, implementing advanced communication systems, forging partnerships with emergency services and conducting regular emergency response exercises.

"The terminal became more than just a place for departures and arrivals—it was a lifeline for a city in turmoil," Mr. Edmondstone added.

"The lessons learned from Cyclone Tracy have not only shaped Darwin International Airport's approach but also informed broader disaster management strategies across Australia."

Today, Darwin Airport remains committed to serving as a key logistics hub for the Northern Territory and beyond, ensuring readiness to support communities during crises.

This anniversary serves as a powerful reminder of Darwin's resilience and the enduring strength of its people. *More Than Just Being There* celebrates that spirit, ensuring the legacy of Cyclone Tracy continues to inspire and educate future generations.

The memorial documentary can be viewed [here](#).

Airport Development Group Media Contact:

Bethany Thornton | True North Strategic Communication

M: 0429 444 725 | E: bethany@truenorthcomm.com.au