FAREWELL TO BIG BILL NEIDJIE

The Northern Territory – indeed the nation – lost a great leader last night.

The leader of the Bunitj clan – best known as Kakadu Man – passed away after a long illness. Big Bill Neidjie was surrounded by family and friends at the East Alligator Ranger Station in Kakadu National Park.

"Big Bill held the respect of all Territorians, as well as thousands of admirers nationally and internationally," Chief Minister Clare Martin said today.

"Through his recorded words and his deeds as a defender of Aboriginal values in Kakadu National Park, the old man personified the richness of our heritage, as well as great personal strength and pride.

"He was a leading model of someone who, while wanting to protect his culture, was also passionate about teaching non-Aboriginal people about his land and his traditions."

Mr John Ah Kit, Minister assisting the Chief Minister on Indigenous Affairs, worked with Big Bill through the 1980s and 1990s.

"He was a tireless worker for his Bunitj clansmen and women, and for all the people of Kakadu. He was an integral part of the development of joint management in Kakadu and in the Ranger negotiations.

"He also led crucial support to his southern Jawoyn neighbours during the Guratba (Coronation Hill) controversy.

"I will always remember him as a kind and gentle man but who would, nevertheless, strongly defend the interests of his people.

"His life, from that of being born in the bush, through to the days of croc shooting and beyond to joint management of Australia's greatest national park, spans an important part of Top End Northern Territory history," said Mr Ah Kit.

Both the Chief Minister and John Ah Kit extended their deepest sympathy to the family and friends of the late Big Bill Neidjie.