Volume 11, Number 2, September 2008

LAND RIGHTS NEWS

Blue Mud Bay, NT Music
awards, Garma,
Coniston 80 years on,
Warlpiri education,
The Big Walk
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A winning photo taken on the walk from Bonney Well to Barrow Creek. The Muru-warinyi Ankull Rangers won a national Working on Country photography competition with this photograph. It shows Tommy Thompson in the foreground and Lynese Breadon, Anthea Graham and Annette Thompson in the background.

Land Rights News continues

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Above: Traditional owners involved in joint management plans at Rainbow Valley.

Rainbow Valley has become the first Territory park to operate under a joint management plan under the frameworks-for-the-future legislation.

The creation of jobs for Aboriginal men and women is a key goal traditional owners are hoping to achieve from the joint management of the Northern Territory’s national parks.

Discussions are continuing between traditional owners of the various parks and the Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Commission over the formation of management plans for the parks, but traditional owners are telling the Central Land Council that they want more Aboriginal rangers working within the parks in full-time jobs.

In the past year, traditional owners for the Chambers Pillar Historical Reserve have been working with Parks and Wildlife to write a new joint management plan for the reserve.

A draft management plan for the Devils Marbles Conservation Reserve was also completed in 2007, the Tjupanta Rangers have been involved in a variety of projects and N’dhala Gorge and Trehina Gorge traditional owners met with Parks for the first time in 2007 to plan the writing of a joint management plan.

In 2007, traditional owners from the east, central and western regions of the West MacDonnell National Park attended a series of planning meetings with Parks to discuss a joint management plan for the park.

Traditional owners of the Davenport Range National Park met this year to discuss how to improve fire management practises and Dulcie Range National Park traditional owners began planning how they could better manage important sites in the ranges.

Wattarka National Park traditional owners appointed a group to work on the writing of a new joint management plan for the park.

Cover photo: Akerange ladies dance for the opening of the Baxter’s well memorial to the Coniston Massacre.
LEASES GET MIXED REACTION

David Ross: ‘Government deals not good enough’

CLC Director David Ross says that the deals put on the table by the Australian Government to lease the communities of Yuendumu, Hermannsburg and Lajamanu “aren’t good enough”.

“The Government has got to understand that people are feeling demoralised – there’s been a lot of changes and a lot of attacks on Aboriginal people and they feel the Government is just going whack, whack, whack," he said.

Mr Ross said the government is already two years into a five year lease over communities but don’t have anything to show for it.

“At a meeting in Hermannsburg recently traditional owners called for a show of good faith,” he said.

“They haven’t even seen any repairs to housing in their community in that time, so why would they have any faith that the government would do any better over the longer-term?

“The offers are also being presented by the government in a dictatorial manner. They aren’t partnerships.

“Unless the communities agree to one of the two options they are being offered, they will not get any new housing,” Mr Ross said.

While negotiations are taking place with the three communities in the Central Land Council’s region, the other Aboriginal communities aren’t even being considered for new housing.

“In the past couple of years Aboriginal people have lost their com-
Almost thirty-years to the day since it was first lodged on behalf of the Larrakia traditional owners by the Northern Land Council (NLC) the Kenbi Land Claim today moved a step closer to a successful resolution.

In a significant milestone the Larrakia traditional owners, the NLC and the Northern Territory Government have reached an in-principle agreement on the settlement of the Kenbi Land Claim which was first lodged on 20 March 1979.

Under the agreement, 13,000 hectares of the land will be granted as freehold, which will allow for the development of residential and commercial interests.

The remaining 52,000 hectares will be declared Aboriginal land.

Larrakia traditional owner, Ms Raylene Singh welcomed the announcement by Chief Minister Paul Henderson on the in-principle agreement in this long running land claim, and urged the Federal Government to support it.

“I am happy about this proposal. We have been fighting to get our rights to our land recognised and returned to us for more than thirty-years, and some of my family have passed away waiting for this to happen,” said Ms Singh.

“This is an agreement that is good for all Larrakia people, and it is also good for the people of Darwin – so the Federal Government should now finalise the process and hand back our country to us so we can start planning our future.”

NLC Chairman, Wali Wunungmurra also welcomed the announcement and supported Ms Singh’s call for the Federal Government to grant the claim as Aboriginal land.

“This has been a long and hard struggle for the Larrakia and they have been strong in their commitment to regain their rightful ownership of their ancestral lands,” said Mr Wunungmurra.

“We still need to have further discussions with various stakeholders including the Federal Government, but we are confident that all interests will be met through this process in a timely manner.”

The agreement is now with the Australian Government for final approval.

Above: NLC members discussing the Kenbi Land Claim settlement

The CLC is listening to your ideas

A survey of traditional owners by the CLC will be used to provide a better service to Aboriginal people in its area.

The Central Land Council wants to find out what CLC work is important for people.

It also wants to find out how CLC could work better for and with communities.

The CLC will use these findings to get better outcomes for Aboriginal people in the future.

The CLC is working with a consultant, Petronella Vaarzon-Morel, to better understand the feedback from Aboriginal people in our communities.

Petronella is undertaking surveys with Aboriginal people across the region.

Petronella has visited communities of Areyonga, Kintore, Bonya, Atitjere, Ali Curung, Yendumu, Utopia, Mutitjulu, Kaltukatjara, Lajamanu and Kalkaringi to talk with people about the CLC work.

She has been asking people what they understand about Land Council work, what they like and don’t like and what could be done better in the future.

People from across the communities have responded well to the survey and Petronella is now writing up her findings in a report.

It is due to be completed in May.

The report will be used by the CLC staff and members to improve our work.

The CLC would like to thank the communities, people and interpreters who were involved in the interviews.

Above: Interpreter Lena Taylor, Millie O’Kai and researcher Petronella Vaarzon-Morel

Right: Lena, Petronella and Jim Nukati
Blue Bush chooks lay golden eggs

Above: Trevor Byrnes and some of his chooks on the Iwapaika Land Trust near Alice Springs

The cackling of some 400 hungry chooks is overwhelming. They are racing - really racing - across their vast pens to meet us. All of them.

The man they are all so keen to see is their owner and carer Trevor Byrnes who says that while he feeds them everyday, they just want more and more because chooks just don’t have anything better to do with themselves.

Except lay about 400 eggs a day.

Trevor lives on the Iwapaika Land Trust about 20 kilometres west of Alice Springs and for the last two years he has been building a free range egg business.

Now he sells 100 dozen eggs on a good week.

“That’s the main idea - to create employment for myself and my family,” he said.

“It’s hard work – it’s seven days a week – collecting the eggs, feeding the chooks and filling the water.

“You also have to clean up the waste which we are selling to a landscape supplier in town for garden fertiliser.

“We’ve had a lot of help from the NT Department of Business and Employment, Arrernte Council when we first started and Ingkerreke Outstation resource Services.

“Now JET employment in town help us market them,” he said.

Trevor says the big money is in the private sales around town but they do sell wholesale to Charbray Meats and Aboriginal caterers Kungkas Can Cook.

He says that building a small business on your Land Trust is the way to go.

“I reckon it would be a good idea for people to get involved in this sort of thing – you can do it on your own place and create your own wage.

“It’s getting a bit hard in town with CDEP but if you’ve got your own business you can build it up and make your own wage and get your family to help.

Trevor says eating his own free range eggs has spoilt him for shop bought caged eggs.

“They just don’t taste the same,” he said.

“When I went on holiday I had to buy some and they were no good.”

However don’t expect to be eating Trevor’s free range chooks.

“Our chooks eat layers pellets.

“They need to be fed different stuff if you are going to eat them.

“But I have eaten one or two myself. Leghorns are tough but these chooks are good,” Trevor said.

Free range eggs from Trevor’s beautiful chooks are available by ringing JET employment phone 89526665

$50 a fortnight for bush humpy

The intervention has a new head. Canberra bureaucrat Mark Zissler took over from Major Chalmers recently and has already been asked to justify the actions of the Federal Government by the angry community at Utopia.

Utopia, north east of Alice Springs, is classified as an outstation, and as such doesn’t qualify for the housing money that is promised to communities who sign up for long term leases.

The 100 or so residents are furious.

“Over the last 30 years, I only see 20 brick buildings on the whole in Utopia, 20 brick buildings, the rest of it’s all rubbish, tin sheds, the oldest, dogs, not fit for dogs now, you know?” resident Dennis Kunoth told ABC Radio.

“People, people think Aboriginal people have got a lot of money; a lot of money might have been released but as I said a lot of it never got right here to where people need it,” he said.

Furthermore the new shire is now charging rent for the existing broken down shacks and humpies.

Mr Zissler saw for himself the terrible state of housing when he visited Lena Pula in her humpy which boasts one tap and a small fridge.

Ms Pula pays $50 a fortnight to live here with four others.

The community is also outraged at the big blue sign erected outside the community.

“This is a model social structure. And the fact that we’ve been blanketed as being rapists, woman bashers, paeodophiles and pornographic-consuming people and alcoholics, that’s not us,” Rosalie Kunoth Monks told the ABC reporter.

“If you want us to break the Federal law, we will get an angle-grinder and we will cut down those signs. Unless you show us the proof of us being what you describe on those signs. It’s not true,” she said.

Mr Zissler said he will brief the Minister when he returned to Canberra.
Traditional Owners disappointed with McArthur River mine decision

Traditional Owners from Borroloola have expressed disappointment with a decision by the Australian Government to give final approval to divert the McArthur River for a mine expansion.

NLC Chief Executive Kim Hill today said that traditional owners are disappointed with the announcement by the Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett to approve the expansion of the McArthur River mine, near Borroloola.

However, the NLC welcomes new stringent environmental monitoring requirements on McArthur River Mining (MRM), and Minister Garrett’s recommendation that MRM pursue ‘a more active engagement with local stakeholders, including Traditional owners.’

“Traditional owners are deeply disappointed the Federal Environment Minister, Peter Garrett, is giving the go-ahead for a diversion of the McArthur River in order for Swiss mining company Xstrata to expand its zinc mining operations,” Mr Hill said.

“There has never been a negotiated agreement between the mining company and traditional owners, and a workable outcome would be the development of an agreement that would provide tangible benefits to local Aboriginal people.”

Mr Hill said traditional owners would obtain legal advice regarding the decision, and as to possible avenues for compensation.

Traditional owners have had numerous cultural and environmental concerns about the mine’s impact on marine life in the McArthur River and offshore, and important cultural sites, “Mr Hill said.

The NLC calls on McArthur River Mining (MRM) to negotiate an agreement with Traditional Owners, and calls on the Northern Territory Government to mandate provisions to ensure all mining companies make public their Mining Management Plan, so that the environmental impact of mining operations is known to the local community.

The decision follows a Federal Court ruling in December 2008 forcing Xstrata to close the mine because the previous Environment Minister’s approval for the mine’s expansion did not take into account the impact on threatened species and migratory birds.

Warlpiri show how it’s done

A group of young Warlpiri filmmakers involved in the Warlpiri Education and Training Trust (WETT) Youth and Media program have made a video that explains what WETT is and what WETT projects are happening on the ground.

The film is made by Warlpiri for Warlpiri in Warlpiri language (with English subtitles) and uses lots of creative and colourful ways to get the WETT story across.

The DVD will be distributed widely to Warlpiri community members, schools, libraries, community organisations, government departments and other Aboriginal groups looking to use royalty monies for community benefit projects.

WETT was set up in 2004 to support the education and training of Warlpiri in four Warlpiri communities - Lajamanu, Yuendumu, Nyirripi and Willowra.

Each year Newmont mining company pays extra royalties into a special trust account for education and training programs.

WETT programs include Community Learning Centre programs, Early Childhood Program run in partnership with World Vision, funding for schools to involve elders in school activities and take kids on country visits, production of bilingual resources and support for secondary students.

Many thanks to Maxwell Japanganka Tasman, Shane Jupurrurla White, Annan Cadden, Verona Nungarayi Jurrah, Kathleen Doolan and Marlene Nangala Robertson for translations. For a copy of the DVD call Georgie Stewart at CLC on 89516246 or email georgie.stewart@clc.org.

CAAMA boost for RIBS

Remote Indigenous broadcasters in Central Australia are taking advantage of the very latest technology to reach their bush audiences according to CAAMA RIBS coordinator Steve Hodder.

“We’ve got a whole new digital system, whole music libraries on PC and you can voice it and create a whole show but we have to get trained up. Basically you can put a two hour playlist on a PC and just back announce each song,” he said.

Steve started the RIBS job at CAAMA at the end of last year.

“I came in towards the end of last year which wasn’t the best timing – there was the Christmas break and ceremony and law going on but now we’re getting on track.

“We’re getting more new trainees. Raphael Ronson will broadcast from Lytentye Apurte, Warren H Williams has been filling in on the Ntaria slot from here in town but that will probably be broadcast live from Hermannsburg hopefully.

“At Areyonga Jonathon Doolan is back so that’s good.

But we still have to hook up with Papunya and get them back in the mix,” Steve said.
Traditional Owners make business a reality at Bradshaw

An agreement between traditional owners and the Australian Defence Force has enabled the setting up of a company to maximise contract work in the Timber Creek area.

The Bradshaw and Timber Creek Contracting and Resourcing Company has completed its first work projects, and is channelling all profits back into the company. The company is owned and staffed by traditional owners from Kununurra, Darwin, Timber Creek, Wyndham and Katherine.

Traditional owner, Daniel Jones, said local people were excited about the upcoming work opportunities, and were keen to build the company.

“We feel pride in being able to protect our sacred sites, and it is good that we are able to get jobs on our own country,” Mr Jones said.

Last year, the ADF contracted the company to open an old existing road to the Fitzmaurice River, which enabled access to a cultural camp site at Mussel Hole. The construction of 27km of boundary fences, including gates, and flood gates came next with all the work completed on time and on budget by five traditional owners from Menggan.

This year the next stage for the company is the continuation of old fence removal around the site. The Bradshaw Indigenous Land Use Agreement allows for the granting of a Defence Purpose Lease to the Commonwealth over the Bradshaw Station, near Timber Creek – over 8,700 km2 of land.

Under the ILUA, set up in 2003 under the Native Title Act, the Traditional Owners have consented to the use of Bradshaw as a field training area for an initial period of 75 years.

The ADF, which has constructed a runway at Bradshaw capable of taking C17 jets, will use the land for defence force exercises.

Future military exercises represent further economic opportunities for the Bradshaw company, including providing laundry services for military personnel, erecting sacred site clearances, erecting signage for protected sites, constructing boundary fences, and identification of exclusion zones.

The Northern Land Council negotiated the agreement on behalf of 800 traditional owners who speak five languages, and is responsible for looking at strategies that maximise Aboriginal employment, including training and business opportunities at Bradshaw.

The agreement ensures continued access to Bradshaw by traditional owners, and, the protection of sacred sites.

New management for Tanami Downs

A new manager has been appointed to one of Australia’s most isolated cattle stations, the Aboriginal-owned Tanami Downs.

Ken Satour has been appointed the new manager of Tanami Downs after the resignation last year of the previous manager.

Ken will be known to many people in the CLC region from his time at the Central Land Council where he worked in several positions including as the pastoral development officer.

Ken has also worked on several stations in the Northern Territory, including Mistake Creek and the old Ngupil Station in Western Australia and adjacent to Tanami Downs.

Ken and his family are working to ensure Tanami Downs gets back on a good financial footing and provides employment opportunities for traditional owners.

In 2006 Kurra Aboriginal Corporation invested in a five year infrastructure rebuild for Tanami Downs. This included fencing and upgrading of watering points.

Wirrindi Aboriginal Corporation also invested in the station by funding the purchase of 44 Droughtmaster Bulls to improve the calving percentage on the station.

In 2008 Kurra again invested in the station by providing funds to repair the homestead and workers quarters, including plumbing and electrical upgrades.

Unfortunately the machinery on the station was left in a very poor and unsafe state but assistance from Kurra has allowed new machinery to be purchased.

In appreciation of this support the station will undertake remedial and fencing works around the outstation and maintain the outstation’s power and water supply.

Other work that has been done includes the fencing of Lake Ruth to provide greater protection to the area from feral animals as well as controlling grazing pressure.
Mungkarta traditional owners go corporate

Traditional owners at Mungkarta, south of Tennant Creek, have instructed the Central Land Council to set up a corporation using any cleanskin cattle from the west side of the Mungkarta and Mungkarta 2 Aboriginal Land Trust as start up funds.

The Mungkarta Cattleman’s Aboriginal Corporation was formed on the 15th of October last year (2008).

The traditional owners raised the idea of setting up their own corporation when agreeing to the grazing license with Wally Klein and Kevin McGrath.

Under the agreement, provision was made for a paddock to be set aside for the traditional owners’ own enterprise with the licensee agreeing to help the traditional owners to maintain their herd.

A business development officer was provided under the Indigenous Pastoral Program (IPP) to work with interested traditional owners to help them achieve their goals through training in governance, the relevant act governing the corporation and to advise on business practises.

The traditional owners’ plan involves starting off with a small herd of 50 to 60 cattle while learning how to set up accounts, pay invoices, set up a budget and then sticking to it, fencing, bore set ups and maintenance, mustering, branding and then how to tag and sell the stock.

Corporation members have chosen their own brand and earmark and are now waiting for the licensee to do a full musty to find out how many cleanskins there are.

It’s a learning process that covers all aspects of managing and running a cattle station so that at the end of the current lease the traditional owners might be in a position to take over from the current licensee or employ an experienced manager they might give direction to.

The members of the Mungkarta Cattleman’s Aboriginal Corporation are a mix of younger men and women and older men.

The younger women have ambitions of being involved in the paperwork side of the business as many of them have better literacy and numeracy levels.

Members have identified that literacy and numeracy training is needed for all of them and having a real and obvious purpose to learn has given them the motivation to dedicate themselves to that.

Ongoing support will be provided to the corporation by the IPP, CLC and the Northern Territory Department of Regional Development, Primary Industry, Fisheries and Resources.

A community meeting with the lessees at Mungkarta last year

Members of the NLC at a recent Full Council meeting in Darwin

New CDEP body to lobby for improvements

Aboriginal organisations that deliver CDEP throughout the Northern Territory have come together to form a new reference group and advocacy body.

CDEP Communities NT (CCNT) has been formed out of concern over proposed CDEP reforms by the Federal Government.

CCNT steering committee member Waturr Gumana, from Gan Gan Homelands, located inland from Blue Mud Bay, said the group is committed to improving CDEP in remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory.

“We believe CDEP works in our communities and our Homelands,” Mr Gumana said.

“We know our CDEP organisations are owned and managed by our people, for our people, in our own communities, and we need to value this knowledge.”

Gumana said Aboriginal people wanted to manage their own communities and determine their own future.

“I believe that a strong CDEP is able to create strong community,” he said.

“We want to encourage all Aboriginal CDEP organisations to be the best they can be and we will support them.”

CDEP Communities NT is made up of the following communities and organisations:

Tangentyere Council (Alice Springs), Laynhapuy Homelands (Arnhem Land), Kalano (Katherine), Jabiru, Barwangana (Maningrida), Ramingining, Papulu Apparri-Kari (Tennant Creek), Inkerreke Outstation Resource Services, Tjuwanpa (Hermannsburg), Mabunji Aboriginal Resource Centre (Borroloola), Marthakal Homelands Resource Centre (Galiwinku), Mungoordba (Robinson River), and Pepimenarti.
Under threat from changed fire regimes, reduced habitat and introduced species like foxes and cats, the endangered bilby may be fighting back.

During the past two years, rangers and traditional owners from the Central Australian region have been conducting monitoring surveys of the iconic species, the greater bilby, over a vast area and the signs are that overall bilby numbers aren’t dropping.

Under the guidance of traditional owners, the Wulailg Rangers (Lajamanu), the Muru-warinyi Ankkul Rangers (Tennant Creek) and the Warlpiri Rangers (Yuendumu, Nyirripi and Willowra) have undertaken many surveys of bilbies and other threatened species and to detect foxes and cats.

Surveys have also been carried out by the Elleuwurru community members on Murray Downs station.

The survey found four active burrows, fresh tracks, scats and diggings.

Those discoveries were significant because they were the first confirmed record of bilbies east of the Stuart Highway for at least 25 years and at least 150 kilometres south-east of any other known bilby populations.

On each survey, rangers and traditional owners would drive along a road or track and stop every five kilometres to look for all types of animal tracks or footprints, diggings, scats and burrows.

Any signs were recorded on an electronic cybertracker or data sheet.

Even with the modern technology available though, organisers maintain the survey wouldn’t have been possible to the same extent without the skills, particularly tracking skills, of traditional owners.

On one survey in the Lander River area in the Tanami Desert, traditional owners dug up a huge male bilby.

The find was cause for great excitement as many people knew how to track bilbies, but they’d never actually seen one before.

Aside from the surveys, action is also being taken to reduce fox numbers.

The Warlpiri Rangers have been baiting foxes at Sangsters Bore and the Muru-warinyi Ankkul Rangers at Mungalawurruru west of Tennant Creek.

In each of those locations, fox baiting devices specially designed by the Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Service so only foxes can take the poisoned bait have been used.

The aim of the baiting program is to give threatened species a chance to rebuild their numbers by reducing the number of foxes.

The recent surveys follow a study 10 years ago and when compared with that survey, the indications are that bilby numbers are being sustained.

This good news though is tempered by the latest results showing that bilbies are disappearing from some areas such as sites near Nyirripi and Kantore.

It’s unclear what the reasons behind the reductions in those areas are.

Bilbies only eat bush onions, witchetty grubs and a few types of grass seeds so they can be seriously affected by changes to fire regimes, increases in predators such as foxes and over grazing by cattle.

Therefore, the number of bilbies in an area can reflect the health of the country.

The surveys program has funding for this year and it’s hoped it will be able to win support for another three years after that.

Currently it’s funded by the Natural Heritage Trust and the Northern Territory Government with assistance provided by the Central Land Council and Desert Wildlife Services.