Central Land Council staff are working around the clock as Land Rights News goes to press to deal with a camel invasion of unprecedented proportions at the small community of Docker River near the West Australian border.

The CLC is preparing for an emergency cull, which it hopes will reduce the numbers by 3000 during four days of aerial shooting and finally give the besieged residents of Docker River a temporary break over Christmas.

It says that the cull will take place within a 50 kilometre radius and be well away from the community.

The damage the camels and other thirsty feral animals like horses have done to sacred sites and waterholes is already considerable.

Waterholes are littered with the bodies of the drought victims and the community swimming waterhole Tjipuka has been tested and has been found to be a serious health risk to due to camel pollution.

CLC Director David Ross said that while the CLC is collaborating on multiple strategies to reduce the numbers of camels in Central Australia, the cull is an emergency measure.

"Unfortunately camels respond very quickly to weather conditions so if the temperature drops or there is rainfall the camels disperse very quickly."

"One day there may be 600 camels in the community and then the next morning there may be 60."

"We do stress this is an emergency stop gap measure only and we are working with the Desert Knowledge Centre, the Northern Territory and Federal Governments and numerous other stakeholders to provide a long-term solution."

The CLC has worked for some years with communities to make them aware of the disastrous environmental impacts made by the animals.

"It is essential that Aboriginal people are consulted before action is taken on their land.

"There used to be resistance to culling because the idea that camels would be shot and left to rot rather than used goes completely against Aboriginal people’s core beliefs,” Mr Ross said.

"However, now we have found that people are so desperate because of the damage and distress that they are saying ‘just get rid of them’.

"Everybody wants to ensure that it is done in the most humane way possible."

As a longer-term strategy, CLC staff are also preparing accessible watering points on the Land Trust, which it hopes will lure camels away from Docker River and enable them to be commercially harvested.

The staff are currently equipping one known bore site and searching for other suitable water sources.

The bore sites will be in accessible locations that are suitable to trap and remove camels for harvest.

"We need funding urgently and in our submission to the Federal Government’s Caring for Our Country program we have asked for bore funding, a community camel worker and trap yards,” Mr Ross said.

The CLC says that while it has applied for funding in the past it has been unsuccessful because government agencies have been reluctant to fund camel control programs until a Desert Knowledge Centre report had been finished.

That report, the product of several years of research, is now finished and a funding agreement is waiting to be signed.

The Federal Government has put $19 million towards camel control with an expectation the states and the Territory will also make substantial contributions.

Commercial operators

Since the crisis, which has been covered extensively by both the Australian and international media, a number of commercial operators have come forward.

The CLC is very keen to have commercial harvesting of camels and has several commercial proposals before it which involve and benefit the community while decreasing camels through commercial harvesting.

It says that proposals need to be ‘sound’.

"A year or so ago a pet meater operated down there without a contract and left carcasses in hunting grounds and close to the community. People were very worried about the health issues,” Mr Ross said.

"It’s our job to ensure that these are fair and sustainable commercial contracts. The community have lost quite badly in the past where people have operated without regard to the law or the community.

"They can bring weeds into undisturbed areas, make new tracks and create erosion, inadver­ently access and damage sacred sites and further alienate community members from making decisions about their own country,” Mr Ross said.

The CLC currently has several commercial proposals before it which involve and benefit the community while decreasing camels through commercial harvesting.

"Of course everybody would prefer that the camels were used rather than wasted, but the scale of the problem is so big that commercial culling alone is not a solution.

"Whatever the solution, it is not an opportunity for anyone to start wildly shooting all over the Land Trust,” Mr Ross said.

"It requires a coordinated re­sponse and it requires the consent of the community and traditional owners of the areas affected.”
Racial Discrimination Act out until 2010

The Federal Labor government has failed to reinstate the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (RDA) despite repeated assurances that it would do so since it was elected in 2007.

Instead the Federal Indigenous Affairs Minister, Jenny Macklin has announced that the RDA will not be reinstated until 31 December 2010.


The Northern and Central Land Councils have been calling on both the Federal Government and the Coalition of Australian Governments to reinstate the RDA and to restore Aboriginal peoples’ legislative human rights – rights taken for granted by every other Australian citizen.

NLC Chief Executive Kim Hill earlier said that without the RDA Aboriginal people will continue to have no legal redress under Australian law in relation to the Northern Territory Emergency Response laws, that is, the federal intervention.

“The Racial Discrimination Act was suspended with the express purpose of denying Aboriginal people everyday, common law human rights so that the federal government could implement its intervention into every aspect of our lives,” he said.

“This does not happen to any other Australian citizen.”

At a meeting of its 90 members in Tennant Creek in November, the Central Land Council said that the Federal Government had squandered a valuable opportunity to reset the relationship with Aboriginal people.

CLC members said that the Federal Government’s application of the RDA to the Northern Territory Emergency Response legislation still ignores Aboriginal people’s interests and its ‘special measures’ remain discriminatory.

CLC director David Ross said that he felt deeply disappointed with the Government.

“The Australian Government should instead be working with Aboriginal people to find solutions to some very difficult, long-term problems,” Mr Ross said.

The RDA was suspended by the former Howard Government in July 2007 to enable the passage of the Northern Territory Emergency Response legislation.

Income quarantine laws set for a national roll out

In a bid to make its income management scheme non-discriminatory the Federal government announced in November that it will extend its income management laws and make it compulsory for all Australian welfare recipients and not just Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory.

This announcement came in the government’s policy statement Landmark Reform to the Welfare System, Re-instatement of the Racial Discrimination Act and Strengthening of the Northern Territory Emergency Response and will be implemented from 1 July 2010. But the latest suite of “welfare reforms” will only apply to the Northern Territory before it is rolled out across the nation.

This scheme will operate similarly to how it operates for Aboriginal people living in Prescribed Areas of the Northern Territory: 50 percent of welfare payments will be quarantined so that it can only be spent on essentials such as food, clothing and rent.

Who will it apply to?

If you are:

• aged 15 to 24 and have been in receipt of youth allowance, newstart allowance, special benefit or parental payment for more than 13 weeks in the last 26 weeks (disengaged youth);
• aged 25 and above (younger than age pension age) who have been in long-term receipt of specified payments, including newstart allowance and parenting payment (long-term welfare payment recipients):
  • assessed by a delegate of the Secretary (in practice, a Centrelink social worker) as requiring income management for reasons including vulnerability to financial crisis, domestic violence or economic abuse; and
  • referred for income management by child protection authorities.

Who will be exempt?

If you:

• can demonstrate that you are a responsible parent

• ensure your children attend school regularly and consistently

• have regular paid employment or are engaged in formal study

• are a veteran

• are on an aged or disability support pension

The government amendments are being referred to a Senate Inquiry. The deadline for submissions is February 1, 2009 and the Committee will report by March 9, 2010

Lose community control, lose the battle

One of the most persistent criticisms of the intervention has been that Aboriginal people have been sidelined and not included in decision making.

Valda Shannon, a cultural liaison officer with the Barkly Shire and a CLC delegate, said that the new alcohol restrictions imposed by the Australian Government further eroded Aboriginal people’s ability to participate in a solution.

“We had to fight for restrictions, that’s how the idea of Thirsty Thursday came about. Thirsty Thursday worked because most people were on social security and payments came on Thursday but the Government changed all that.

“Payments were made on different days. It felt like we weren’t at the table anymore. It had been hijacked by non-Aboriginal people and governments.”

“I think it important for Aboriginal people to control, to make decisions, to participate in discussions about how alcohol should be sold because we know our families. ‘We live with them, we live with the issues that come with it. It is a stronger message coming from us rather than the Government.”

4 DECEMBER 2009 • LAND RIGHTS NEWS

CLC members at the Council’s November meeting in Tennant Creek
Permits still required on Aboriginal land

The NLC has replaced the old sign (right) as you leave the Nhulunbuy Special Purpose Lease on the Melville Bay road that leads from Nhulunbuy to Yirrkala and Katherine. The original sign was erected more than 30 years ago.

Above: The NLC’s Alan Timms and Richard Singh at the new sign.

Permits are still required for all visitors to enter and to remain on Aboriginal land throughout the Northern Territory. To apply please contact the relevant Land Council.

Central Arnhem Highway talks

Meetings have been held at many communities and outstations serviced by the Central Arnhem Highway to seek the opinions of Traditional Owners and residents about possible upgrades.

The 760km highway that passes near Barunga, Wugularr, Maincuru Store, Weemol, Bulman, the Raminginjbanggum and Gapuwiyak.

At this stage these meetings are not about making decisions. Some of the possible upgrades to the highway are being asked to consider include:
- bridges over the Maincuru, Goyder, Little Goyder and Doinji crossings (these upgrades could cut roads closure from 4 – 6 months to 1 – 2 months);
- a 150 metre wide corridor to allow for services and drainage – one option they want considered is for this corridor to be leased via a negotiated agreement with the NLC for long term (50 years plus) to the NT Government. This option would ensure TO’s retain access control of the Central Arnhem Highway; and
- the progressive upgrade of the road to two lane sealed standard.

“The NLC plans to visit the region again after the Wet to undertake a Social Impact Assessment study. This process will give people time to consider all factors in deciding what they believe should happen in the longer term.

“A key thing for them to consider is the possible impact of having more outside people using the road and visiting the area.

“We want to make sure the government fully understands the views of Aboriginal people about this issue. It’s about them being in a position to make a fully informed decision.”

If you, your community or group would like further information about these consultations, please contact Syd Stirling at the NLC telephone: 8920 5113.

Renal ban leaves lives in the balance

The organisation that runs renal dialysis services for Aboriginal people from the Western Desert says it remains deeply worried about a Northern Territory Government order that patients from the West Australian side of the border travel to Perth for treatment rather than Alice Springs.

Western Desert Nganampan Walytja Palyantjaku Tjutaku (Western Desert Dialysis Mob) has been running dialysis, advocacy and patient support services in Alice and Waingurru (Kim-tore) for five years. Its co-ordinator Sarah Brown said people are deeply worried for their family members who need dialysis.

“They want to be able to look after them in Alice,” she said. “In February this year the NT Government banned patients from Central Australia who live on the other side of whitefella borders in WA and South Australia coming to Alice Springs for dialysis.

“Desert people in communities such as Kiwirrkura, Tjukurla, Ernabella and Amata have always looked towards Alice for family and support. Now they are being told that they must move to Perth or Adelaide. Many are choosing to die on country rather than move so far from home.”

Ms Brown said WONPWT has received support from all over Australia with people writing letters to politicians asking them to change the policy, but as LNR went to print, the policy still stood.

The Central Land Council is among the organisations that have come out in support of scrapping the policy.

CLC Director David Ross said it is a national disgrace and an act of unconsolable cruelty that Patrick Tjungurrayi, who painted for the fundraising campaign to provide dialysis equipment for Western Desert people, is unable to receive care in Central Australia.

Mr Tjungurrayi has been refused dialysis treatment in Alice Springs because he lives in Kiwirrkura in Western Australia.

Mr Ross said the NT, SA and WA Governments need to sort the issue out as a matter of urgency.

“For Aboriginal people, state borders are arbitrary, just lines drawn by somebody across their traditional lands. They certainly don’t align with Aboriginal cultural or linguistic boundaries or traditional Aboriginal land ownership,” Mr Ross said.

In a letter to Greens Senator Rachel Siewert that she read in the Senate, manager of Papunya Tula Artists Paul Sweeney laid out the insulting way Mr Tjungurray had been treated after helping to raise $1 million for dialysis services in Central Australia.

“The tragic irony of this situation is that Patrick was one of the main contributors to the initial fund raiser by overseeing the collaborative painting done by the Kiwirrkura men that went on to raise $300,000 and now he is unable to access the facilities resulting from his effort,” Mr Sweeney wrote.

Mr Tjungurrayi had also invested his own personal battle with renal disease.

She wrote: “It was made profoundly apparent to my family through our experiences that my father’s relative longevity was greatly enhanced by his family being close to him. The mental health issues associated with end stage renal disease are well known and significantly curbed by family support,” Ms Perkins wrote.

If you would like to help with the campaign to reverse this ban, please email Western Desert Dialysis on wdnwpt@bigpond.net.au or ring the Purple House in Alice Springs on (08) 8953644 or ask for Sarah.
McArthur River Mine Management Plan must be made public

In response to the second Independent Monitor’s report released in November on the McArthur River Mine, the Northern Land Council (NLC) has called on the Northern Territory Government to amend its Mine Management Act so that Mine Management Plans are made public documents.

NLC Chief Executive Kim Hill said that McArthur River Mine (MRM) operates in a virtual secrecy because Mine Management Plans are secret documents between mining companies and the NT Government.

“The NT Government must make the MRM Mine Management Plan a public document because neither Aboriginal Traditional Owners nor the general public knows whether MRM is complying with its Mine Management Plan because it’s secret,” said Mr Hill.

“Consistently Traditional Owners, and others, have raised concerns about environmental damage to the McArthur River and surrounding environs and its impact on the NT Government and MRM to provide us with certainty that these concerns are being thoroughly addressed which currently does not happen,” Mr Hill said.

“We all have a right to know what's going on. We need transparency in this process not a closed door – this report raises important issues of compliance, or the lack thereof!”

The reporting period was October 2009 to September 2008 where the information is now 14 months old; where has this report been for all this time? MRM has given this report on 1 October 2009 and we are only now finding out about it.

“And now the next Independent Monitor’s report is not due until September next year! This is far too late for any of us to know whether MRM is complying with its Mine Management Plan because it’s secret."

A Central Australian mining royalty association is leading the way in community development.

A new committee set up by the Kurra Aboriginal Corporation has just approved $650,000 for community development projects for Warlpiri people.

The new committee, which makes decision making easier and simpler, will meet twice a year to discuss and approve funds for use by the Warlpiri Education and Training Trust (WETT).

Previously, Kurra would make these decisions during their royalty distribution meetings.

The Warlpiri Education and Training Trust, (WETT) was set up in 2004 by Warlpiri traditional owners with additional royalties from Newmont’s gold mining operations in the Tanami.

The Central Land Council administers the Trust on Kurra’s behalf.

WETT money is used on education and training projects in Warlpiri communities to create a better future for Warlpiri people.

It is already in partnership with World Vision to deliver early childhood care and development programs in some Warlpiri communities.

Some of the main decisions that were made by the Kurra committee at the October meeting were:

- $40,704 for the Central Desert Shire to establish and look after a training room at Willoura. This money will help to buy computers, furniture and other equipment, and will also pay for training for Aboriginal community members in Willoura in 2010.
- $80,000 ($2,500 for each student) to help Warlpiri students going to boarding school at Yirra, Kornilda and Worowa (Victoria) colleges to buy things they need for school and do extra curricular activities like excursions during 2010.
- $37,500 ($2,500 for each student) to help Warlpiri students at schools outside the Warlpiri community or boarding schools to buy things they need for school and participate in activities like school excursions during 2010.
- $200,000 ($2,500 for each student) for secondary students at schools in the Warlpiri communities to go on excursions in 2010.
- $296,657 for Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education to operate and manage a new Nyirripi Learning Community Centre.
- $112,100 from money already given to World Vision Australia to be used to help pay for a governance support worker and a mentor for Warlpiri Early Childhood Care and Development workers as part of the WETT Early Childhood Program.

Some of these projects have been funded by WETT before and some of them are new, like the Nyirripi Learning Community Centre Coordinator position and the Willoura training room.
For the first time, traditional owners have used aerial burning technology to keep country healthy in two of Australia’s most remote areas.

Earlier this year, senior traditional land owners in the southern and central Tanami trialled the ‘Raindance’ machine, which allows them to drop small incendiary devices from a low flying helicopter this year.

In the trials, the traditional owners directed burning on their family lands near Lake Mackay and Lake Surprise and burnt a total of around 50,000 hectares of country in hundreds of patch burns under mild conditions. It is hoped to expand these trials next year.

People were very pleased with the results of their burning work. They were able to visit sites on their country and then burn lots of small fires exactly where they wanted.

It is the only way that traditional owners of very remote, inaccessible lands can do enough burning to keep their country healthy.

The CLC sourced funding for the $26,000 machine from the federal Government.

**Caring for Our Country and Natural Disaster Mitigation programs.**

Aboriginal Rangers and CLC Land Management staff were trained in operating the machine in Alice Springs before the trials started.

The CLC hopes to be able to support interested traditional owners in other remote areas to trial the aerial burning technology on their country in the future.

**HOW IT WORKS...**

The aerial burning device is mounted in a helicopter and at the press of a button, two chemicals are mixed together in a small plastic capsule, which drops down a chute and on to the ground.

After less than a minute, the chemicals react and ignite. A computer records exactly where each one of these incendiaries is dropped.

Thousands of incendiaries have been used in a single day, to light lots of small fires across the vast Tanami lands, which will help protect their country from the devastation of massive summer wildfires.

(Above) Smoke drifts across the Tanami Desert during burn offs lit from the air. (Below) Traditional owners Mickey Singleton addresses rangers during planning for burn offs in the Tanami.

**New Warlu Committee for the Tanami**

Fire management in the vast Tanami Desert will get a significant boost from a new committee made up of Aboriginal fire practitioners from the area.

The Warlu Committee is made up of two community members and a senior ranger from Dagaragu, Lajamanu, Tennant Creek, Alice Springs, Willowra, Yuendumu and Nyirripi. These members were chosen based on their knowledge of country, culture and fire and their willingness to speak up strongly about fire management on Aboriginal Land.

Importantly, there is a broad mix of old people, young people, ladies and men on the committee.

Fire management has become critical in the Tanami where large, uncontrolled wildfires spread across vast tracts of inaccessible spinifex country every few years.

Between 1999 and 2002 there were good rainfalls in the Tanami and fuel loads became extremely high in some areas.

Fires frequently burnt out of control and in 2002 smoke could be seen for several weeks west of Alice Springs from several very large fires in the region.

In 2007, after two good rainfall seasons, almost half of the Tanami was again consumed by fire.

In such a big landscape, fire management needs to be considered at a strategic level to be effective.

The Warlu Committee will begin to tackle big picture fire issues across the Tanami and provide strategic direction to the CLC’s fire program.

The committee decided on its rules and structure and the types of issues it would talk about at a meeting held by the CLC in September.

It’s been a busy time for Aboriginal fire management in the Tanami, so the Warlu Committee had a lot to discuss.

Some regional issues talked about were: aerial burning; the committees’ boundary and representation; firebreaks and protection of outstations; and how the old and new fire laws work.

Senior rangers from Lajamanu, Tennant Creek and Yuendumu proudly talked about fire work their ranger groups did in 2009.

The committee met with scientists from CSIRO to talk about the greenhouse effect of fire management.

They also visited Bushfires NT to hear about the greenhouse effect and fire management.

The newly-created Warlu Committee (above) that will look at “big picture” fire issues and a CSIRO presentation on the greenhouse effect of fires.
$9 million in ABA grants spread across NT

Regions across the Northern Territory are set to benefit from more than nine million dollars worth of grants from the Aboriginals Benefit Account.

The Federal Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin said a recreation precinct at Mutitjulu, an early childhood centre at Willowra, an Aboriginal cattle enterprise near Tennant Creek, a program to introduce students to the media industry in Alice Springs and the Garma Festival are among the beneficiaries.

Imparja Television in Alice Springs will receive a grant of $132,150 to teach Year 12 students in Alice Springs all aspects of the television industry.

The Just Imagine 2009 program will cover work practices and budgets and the maintenance and operation of a wide range of media equipment.

The students' final project will be the production of a documentary, which will involve filming, editing and recording voiceovers. The documentary will be aired on Imparja Television in December this year.

The Bluebush Cattle Aboriginal Corporation on the Karalntja North Aboriginal Land Trust receives $496,533 for fencing, equipping a new bore and infrastructure projects.

The community's Gina Bennett said the corporation is slowly building up its herd of cattle.

"We've built up a herd of about 250 head in the past couple of years," she said.

"We've struggled with no outside help to get to this stage so the grant will give us a welcome boost."

The Papulp Apparr-Kari Aboriginal Corporation in Tennant Creek provided Bluebush with help to secure the grant.

There's funding also for the control of dogs in remote communities and to help Aboriginal organisations improve services for their clients, including funding to help the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency buy new premises in Darwin and the refurbishment and upgrade of the Alice Springs office of the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association.

The ABA grants aim to fund priority projects which will help improve the lives of Aboriginal people living throughout the Northern Territory.

The ABA was established under the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976.

It receives financial compensation from the Commonwealth Government equivalent to the value of royalties paid by mining interests on Aboriginal land.

Grants: Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association, Alice Springs, upgrade property, $636,000; Yothu Yindi Foundation, Yirrkala, Garma Festival 2010, $150,000; North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency, Darwin, office building, $941,000; Shepherdsdown College, Galiwinku, school bus, $92,120; Imparja Television, Alice Springs, just imagine 2009, $132,150; Warlukurlangu Artists Aboriginal Corporation, Yuendumu, Restoration of the Men's Museum, $250,000; Central Desert Shire Council, Engawa, Engawa Basketball court roof and lighting, $252,000; Animal Management in Rural and Remote Communities, NT wide, Dog health manuals for remote communities, $76,663; Arts Back NT Arts Development, Alice Springs, Indigenous dance project, $170,000; Papulp Apparr-Kari Aboriginal Corporation, Tennant Creek, Cattle Enterprise, $496,533; Nauiyu Nambiyu Inc, Nauiyu Nambiyu, Vehicle breakdown and recovery, $140,327; Northern Land Council; NT North Region, Women's consultation in Central Australia, $100,000; Mabunji Aboriginal Resource Association, Borrooloola, Sea ranger vessel, $98,300; Central Land Council, NT Central Region, Ceremonial and Funeral, $500,000; Gurindji Freedom Day Committee, Daguragu/Kalkaringi, Gurindji Freedom Day 2009, $50,000; Central Land Council, Willowra, Construction of early childhood centre and duplex accommodation for staff and visitors, $2,622,374; Central Land Council, Mutitjulu, Construction of a youth and recreation precinct, $2,257,500; Thamarrurr Development Corporation, Wadeye, Purchase construction machinery and upgrade housing and construction workshop OHS standards, $500,000; TOTAL: $9,444,967

Mutitjulu and Willowra community development projects get a boost

The Central Land Council has welcomed the commitment of Aboriginals Benefit Account (ABA) funds to its community development initiatives in two of Central Australia's most neglected communities.

The Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Jenny Macklin announced that $2,257,500 had been granted for a recreation precinct at Mutitjulu and $2,622,374 for construction of an early childhood centre and accommodation for staff and visitors at Willowra.

CLC Director David Ross said that these funds supplemented the investments already put in by the communities.

"Traditional owners of the Uluru Kata Tjuta National Park committed $500,000 of their share of the rent from the Park to building a pool at Mutitjulu project that has very strong community support."

"Willowra has suffered a disgraceful level of government neglect and has virtually nothing in terms of infrastructure despite being home to 300 people."

"Through the Warlpindi Education and Training Trust (WETT), Warlpindi traditional owners committed $660,000 of their mining commitment of further funds and the $2,622,374 from the ABA will enable the Willowra project to go ahead."

"Operational funding is still unclear, even after months of negotiation with the Australian Government."

"Willowra isn't designated as a 'Growth Town' under the Northern Territory and Australian Government's indigenous funding policies and therefore like some 25 other communities in our region, not eligible for much at all."

"But in Willowra alone there are at least 30 children under five who are set to benefit from an early childhood centre," Mr Ross said.

"Under the Growth Towns policy the only alternative for these children would have been to spend four hours a day travelling to Yuendumu and back every day."

"These types of community development projects which have community involvement and support make positive and tangible differences to peoples lives."
M (KUNMANARARA) WILSON
The Pitjantjatjara Woman Who Stopped the World

by Maggie Kavanagh who was the Co-ordinator of the NPY Women’s Council from 1988 - 2003.

Mary in Central Australia were shocked and saddened by the death of significant Pitjantjatjara leader, Mrs M. Wilson, in Adelaide on 10th October.

Her death is a tremendous loss for many black and white - locally, nationally and internationally. We all looked to her for guidance and strength.

She was truly an extraordinary woman. She has left behind an enormous legacy that is testimony to her great intellect, unwavering leadership, depth of traditional knowledge and authority and irresistible personality.

Many regarded her as a formidable life force - a trailblazer who opened many doors, particularly for Aboriginal women and children.

Many Australians will recall her powerful and moving interview about child sexual abuse on the ABC’s Lateline in June 2006.

Moved to tears, she spoke openly about the extent of these serious problems that were devastating communities, including within her own family.

She was born in 1944 near Pilyaritjara in SA, in the heart of Pitjantjatjara country.

Her name in Pitjantjatjara means of the land.

No other person has this name.

As a young girl she led a very traditional life with her family travelling widely in the cross border region of WA, SA & NT and going to school at Ernabella Mission.

Her first job was in the Ernabella Art Centre making floor rugs and moccasins out of kangaroo skin.

She was also an original member of the famous Ernabella Choir.

She worked in the clinic as a health worker before she moved to Kalka, SA, where she spent her early adult years with her husband and two young sons.

As an experienced health worker she played a pivotal role in establishing the Pitjantjatjara Homelands Health Service in the 1970s.

She was influential in setting up many other organisations in Central Australia including the Pitjantjatjara Council in 1976, Ngarluma Health Council in 1980, the Mulka Women’s Health Council in 1983, the Alukura Women’s Health Council in 1987 and the Central Australian Advocacy Service in 1990.

She was also a highly valued Aboriginal liaison officer at the Alice Springs hospital in the early 1990s.

Arguably one of her greatest achievements was her role in establishing the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women’s Council.

Mentored by senior women like Ngaanyatjarra Ilaytjari and Myra Watson she too was greatly concerned that women were excluding women from the Pitjantjatjara lands rights debate in South Australia in the 1970s.

The older women were saying they needed their own council and she was listening.

As part of a delegation of women from the tri-state area she attended the ANZAAS Aboriginal women’s conference in Adelaide in May 1980.

Convened by Professor Fay Gale, it was the first Australia-wide meeting of Aboriginal women at an ANZAAS conference. Her political awareness was rapidly developing and following the conference Mrs Wilson was ready to act.

Her desire for women to have a voice was the passion that would constitute her raison d’etre for the rest of her life.

She made a cassette tape of her thoughts and asked the Institute for Aboriginal Development in Alice Springs to make copies and send them to communities in the tri-state region where her female relatives resided.

Her herding call resulted in a major gathering of women at Kanpi on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara lands in South Australia in November 1980.

With the support of long time friend and community development worker at Pilyaritjara, Diane James, the NPY Women’s Council was formed.

From that time she led the way in all the significant work of the organisation.

continued next page.
In the early days she played a major role in supporting the protection of women’s sacred sites, working closely with anthropologists and lawyers from a number of Aboriginal organisations. Later she would stand side by side with Arrente women to oppose, successfully, bulldozers set to destroy major sacred sites for the damming of the Todd River just north of Alice Springs in 1994.

She fought tirelessly to curb the devastating flow of alcohol from the Curtin Springs Roadhouse, in 1989 leading 300 women in a protest march down the Lasseter Highway and finally saw an agreement brokered between the licensee and the Women’s Council that has continued for more than a decade.

She spearheaded the establishment of aged care and disability services in the communities.

She raised her voice for the old people at times when they were in distress, far away from country.

She made extensive national and international links with other Indigenous women and travelled widely to speak at conferences and meet with countless government people.

She was invited to speak overseas and travelled on a number of occasions to New Zealand, Canada and the USA. Former NPY Women’s Council chairwoman and friend Yani Baker remembers: “She was someone who was not afraid to speak to anyone, different status, different languages, different cultures. She was a strong fighter for Land Rights.

“She was ‘the lady who made the road’, small road to a bigger road with women and children following behind. Just the way Moses led the people to the Promised Land. She is like a hero.” At great personal cost she advocated for the NPY Women’s Council to establish a domestic violence service and guided it in its early days.

Whilst living at Muthitjulu community she provided refuge to many women and kids at a time when the police would not attend domestic violence incidents.

She is widely acknowledged by women for being the courageous woman who stood up to men in communities and challenged their positions of power and privilege.

She did not shrink away from the difficult subjects and was, in her own words “not scared of anyone”.

Tragically, in recent years she lost both of her sons through alcohol abuse. She was devastated that in spite of all her hard work and years of advocacy about substance abuse, domestic violence and child sexual assault she could not protect her own close family members from their horrendous effects.

From her colleagues she commanded absolute respect and admiration. Many will remember her ferocious loyalty to and protectiveness of her workers.

Not surprisingly, she was a talented and prodigious artist.

She created an outstanding series of dot paintings over many years depicting modern narratives of social and political issues important to her — including domestic violence, child protection, substance misuse, the needs of the aged and people with disabilities and the importance of Aboriginal women’s Law.

We loved her mischievous humour, her quick wit, her strong spirit, her ability to be 10 steps ahead of everyone else and to make us laugh raucously.

Many of us were lucky to bear witness to her vast ceremonial knowledge.

When she danced, the Two Sisters or sang one of the countless verses from Kutungu, the hairs would stand up on the back of your neck.

She was so graceful and commanding when she took the desert stage — her magnetism always drawing you into her world.

To countless Aboriginal women in Central Australia she is remembered for her prodigious ritual knowledge and her generosity in sharing it.

On a personal note I am proud to call her my malapu — friend — for the past 22 years. I regard her as one of the most significant influences in my life.

On the night of the opening ceremony of the Sydney Olympics in 2000, I sat on the ground of the stadium next to her in the dark. The 327 Aboriginal women from Central Australia filed past us for the start of the Awakenings Ceremony.

She softly spoke into a loud hailer coaching the women to keep their lines straight, not to be nervous and to hold their heads up proud.

Suddenly a magnificent soaring voice pierced the darkness with an intense series of spine tingling notes.

It was Mrs Wilson intoning the Seven Sisters to the universe.

For 15 seconds her voice alone reverberated in the still air in front of 100,000 people.

As I held her hand I whispered “That’s you. The whole world can hear only your voice.”

These moments will remain one of the highlights of my life.

Her name we cannot yet utter but we will always treasure her in our hearts.

She was our fearless leader with the unforgettable voice.

The recent death of J. Nungarrayi Egan, a Warlipiri woman who fought for years to improve life for Warlipiri children and young people was a devastating loss for the people of Yuendumu and the wider Central Australian community.

Central Land Council Director David Ross said Ms Egan’s contribution to education in the Warlipiri region was enormous.

“Ms Egan worked at the Yuendumu School for many years and she had a long-term commitment to bilingual education and the importance of learning Warlipiri culture.” Mr Ross said.

“She was a long time member of the Land Council and always made a valuable contribution to discussion.

“Her concerns were always for young people and equipping them to cope in a rapidly changing world without losing their Warlipiri culture.

"With her husband, she was also a founder of the Jaru Pirjirji Program after working for many years with Mt Theo,” he said.

“They often took young Warlipiri men and women to Dreamtime sites to sing the songs and stories of that area and teach them the proper way of doing things.

“Now, thanks to their inspiration, many young men and women are taking their place as the future leaders of Yuendumu,” Mr Ross said.

Ms Egan represented Central Australian people at the highest levels, most recently at Kevin Rudd’s Summit.

Mr Ross said she left a “lasting and priceless legacy to us all”.

“On behalf of the CLC members and staff, I offer our most sincere condolences to Ms Egan’s family.

“We were all deeply saddened by her passing,” he said.

The CLC will put out public notices when a meeting is due to be held in your region.

Elections for the Chair, Deputy Chair and Executive will be held at the CLC’s meeting in April supervised by the Australian Electoral Commission.