



Northern Land Council

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19 January 2005

Shane Stone
Federal Liberal Party
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Dear Shane

On October 30, 2004, over 300 people from across the Northern Territory and Australia came together in Darwin to remember and pay tribute to the 30-year contribution of outgoing Northern Land Council chairman Galarrwuy Yunupingu.

To help commemorate the historic event, the Northern Land Council has put together a video of the many tributes and speeches made on the night including former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, NT Administrator Ted Egan, former Aboriginal Affairs Minister Ian Viner, NT Minister John Ah-Kit as well as Banduk Marika and Raymitjirr Marika representing his large family.

Of course, the video features the man himself, Galarrwuy Yunupingu, who talks about his life after the Northern Land Council, and his hopes for the future of the Northern Territory.

Also enclosed are edited transcripts of several speeches made on the night.

Please accept and enjoy this piece of history.

Yours sincerely

Norman Fry
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

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Galarrwuy Yunupingu Tribute Dinner

Video Running Order (80 minutes)

- 1. Belyuen Traditional Dancers (performance)**
- 2. Bakamumu Marika (speech)**
- 3. Banduk Marika (speech)**
- 4. Marika and Yunupingu family presentation**
- 5. Marika family (speech)**
- 6. Raymittjirr Märika (speech)**
- 7. Gough Whitlam (speech)**
- 8. Ian Viner (speech)**
- 9. Norman Fry (speech)**
- 10. John Ah-Kit (speech)**
- 11. Ted Egan (speech)**
- 12. Ted Egan and Galarrwuy Yunupingu perform 'Gurindji Blues'**
- 13. Galarrwuy Yunupingu (speech)**

**Northern Land Council Tribute Dinner to outgoing NLC chairman
Galarrwuy Yunupingu**

30 October 2004

Holiday Inn

Esplanade, Darwin, Northern Territory

Speakers:

Banduk Marika – ‘For over 30 years we the Gumatj and the mother clan, together with all other Aboriginal groups in the Northern Territory, have fought a long, hard fight for land and sea rights. It has been a rough sea, and the passage has seldom been smooth.

You (Galarrwuy) have been the captain of our ship and have steered us through stormy waters and dangerous reefs.

You have been the rock on which we have anchored our struggles.

Our ship is so much stronger now than when you started out, and our children and our grandchildren can now navigate the rivers of the change so much more easily than when we were young.

But our ship has not yet reached the shores, and there are many more stormy waters and reefs ahead.

Our land, our waters, our rights, our future are not yet soundly anchored.

You leave us now so much stronger than before but you must stay closer now before we reach the shores.’

Gough Whitlam – ‘I have known Galarrwuy Yunupingu’s family for just over 60 years.

I first met them in June 1944 when RAAF squadron 13, in which I was the navigator, was posted to the new Gove airfield at Yirrkala Mission.

We were greeted by Galarrwuy’s father, Mungurrawi, who was nursing his six-month-old son.

The baby was the same age of my first son, Antony, who is now on the Federal Court.

I took him in my arms and he pissed on me! I used to say it was Galarrwuy. Barry Cohen has written that in a radio interview with Galarrwuy in 1989 I said, 'A lot of people would liked to have done that since.'

The baby was not Galarrwuy, who was born four years later, but his half-brother.

The original airstrip at Yirrkala was constructed of bauxite pebbles.

My pilot, a graduate in agricultural science, did not realise we were protecting a treasure.

We remained in touch until he died two years ago at the NSW coastal town, which should be known as 'Gough's Harbour'.

Our squadron had come from the Lutheran Cooktown Mission whose Indigenous inhabitants had been expelled to a location near Rockhampton.

In this new difficult climate, hundreds of them died.

In our six months at Yirrkala I was able to contrast the living conditions of Aborigines around the aerodromes from Cape York Peninsula across the Northern Territory to the Kimberleys.

Yirrkala was a Methodist Mission established only a decade earlier.

The people still retained their dignity and their identity.

They didn't get liquor and tobacco from our canteen.

They went fishing with us at Melville Bay with their spears and our nets.

Thanks to them when I joined the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party in February 1953 I knew more than any other Member about the conditions of Aborigines living in northern Australia.

My first political campaign was at Yirrkala supporting Prime Minister Curtin's post-war reconstruction and democratic rights referendum in August 1944.

Our squadron, and other members of the forces, voted in favour, but the civilians let us down.

I resolved to join the Australian Labor Party when I left the RAAF.

I have another memory of our pre-Galarrwuy Nhulunbuy.

Some of our comrades crashed in a glassy sea during gunnery practice off the coast.

Our commanding officer appointed me to assist the Methodist chaplain, a Fijian, in conducting the funeral service.

The coffins were draped in Union Jacks because during the Second World War the RAAF had to operate under British laws as the RAN did.

In 1963 the Queensland Government, headed by a Lutheran, and the Australian Government, headed by a simple Presbyterian, connived at the sale of the Mapoon Mission to Camalco.

In February, the Prime Minister, without discussions with the Yirrkala people, announced that 360 square kilometres were to be excised from the Arnhem Land reserve for Nabalco.

Wandjuk Marika, a skilled bark painter, helped prepare the Bark Petition which Kim Beazley senior presented to the House of Representatives on the 12th of September.

It was the most memorable and effective petition ever presented to any Parliament in Australia.

On the 29th of October a committee of the House presented a report on the grievances in the petition.

The report was the first official document to mention sacred sites, and land grants.

When my government won its great victory in 1972 I had a number of priorities for Australia.

One of the most important was to see Aboriginal rights to country recognised and accepted by the Australian people.

The Marika family were plaintiffs in the pioneer land rights case before Justice Blackburn in 1970, and witnesses for Justice Woodward's Royal Commission in 1973.

The Aboriginal Loans Commission Act and Aboriginal Land Fund Act followed in 1974, and the *Aboriginal Councils and Associations Bill* and *Aboriginal Land Northern Territory Bill* in 1975.

The bills were substantially enacted in 1976 and 1978, and Ian Viner who was in charge is here this evening.

I am delighted tonight to be with Warren Snowdon whom I've known since he was working with Nugget Coombs a quarter of a century ago, and Daryl Melham, whom, after the defeat of the Keating Government in 1996, I took to Cooktown, where I had been stationed, half a century earlier.

In 1988 the Bicentennial of the British occupation of the east coast of Australia, I was given the single honour of being asked to open two historic Aboriginal cultural events at Yirrkala.

Galarrwuy Yunupingu introduced me, and Roy Marika gave me a bark painting which I treasure.

One of Squadron 13s aircraft was displayed near the airstrip.

I remember when Galarrwuy was 28 and became a member of the interim Northern Land Council (as part of) of the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Land Rights Act*.

I remember when he was 30 and chosen as Australian of the Year.

I remember when he was 35 and became chairman of the NLC.

I remember when he was 37 and was made a Member of the Order of Australia, which I had advised the Queen to establish.

I remember Governor-General Sir Ninian Stephen inviting Galarrwuy to Government House for a luncheon with the Queen.

Margaret and I remember that the Duke, not always politically correct at these occasions, gave a few corroboree steps.

And the Queen, a very patient person, said, 'Oh, Phillip.'

Margaret and I remember when Galarrwuy was 50, and the three of us were honoured among Australia's National Living Treasures in Sydney Town Hall.

I remember when, in the same year, Margaret and I heard him deliver the third annual Vincent Lingiari memorial lecture at the university's Casuarina campus.

Governor-General Sir William Deane delivered the first lecture two years previously.

I, the second lecture one year previously, and Malcolm Fraser the year after Galarrwuy.

Galarrwuy Yunupingu has always been an innovator and a contributor, we wish him many more years.

He will always be remembered with respect in Australia.

Thank you.'

Ian Viner – 'I think for all of us, some people are permanently etched in our memory.

For me, Galarrwuy is one of those persons.

Galarrwuy's impact on me was forged in land rights.

Going back as Gough Whitlam has said, to the case of Justice Blackburn, when unfortunately for Australian law, Justice Blackburn couldn't find that traditional land rights of the Aboriginal people were property rights just like the property rights that you and I have to our traditional land, the homes in which we live.

So when I came along in 1976, I recall a journalist telephoning me, and saying, 'What are you going as Minister for Aboriginal Affairs'.

Instinctively I said, 'Pass the *Land Rights Act*'.

And it was my great privilege, to introduce the Bill on the 4th June, 1976, and see that Act passed by the end of the year.

Galarrwuy, from then on, became a person at centre stage of the land rights movement.

He was in very simple terms a natural leader, who could cross all political boundaries, all cultural boundaries, and all racial boundaries, and persuade people across Australia that the cause of land rights was a just cause, and there was nothing to fear from it.

For so many years from those beginnings Galarrwuy was the voice of Aboriginal Australia, and was the leadership of the land rights movement.

My personal relationship with Galarrwuy was forged in those times.

I suppose the word 'trust' is a hackneyed one, and is often used, but I use it tonight with great personal feeling and sensitivity because as Minister I had to have Galarrwuy's trust and he had to have mine if we were to pilot that legislation through the Australian Parliament.

And we had that trust in each other, I felt it strongly then, and I feel it strongly today, after the passage of so many years.

It is trust of a kind when I as Minister could wait for a telephone call from Galarrwuy and not make a decision nor take any action until I had received that telephone call.

I felt then that in doing that Galarrwuy had the same feeling that he knew I was waiting and that when he called I would respond.

I think it can be safely said that without the history that came out of Yirrkala in those early days, without the assistance of people such as Gough Whitlam, Kim Beazley senior and Gordon Bryant and others, the Northern Territory would not have the Land Rights Act and the land rights it has today.

The Land Rights Act of the Northern Territory is one of the most important pieces of legislation ever passed by the Australian Parliament and I hope that nothing is ever done to remove that legislation from the statute books of the Commonwealth.

There is one fundamental point about the *Northern Territory Land Rights Act* and the land titles granted to it, that it does give ownership of traditional lands to the traditional owners.

It gives ownership in the same way that ownership is given to people who own their own home.

In legal terms, for those lawyers who are here, it gives it as a title in fee simple, which is the greatest extent of ownership that the law can give.

Let me tell you a little story about that.

After the Bill was passed, and the first titles had to be issued, the public servants came to me, and said, 'Minister what is this title going to say?'

'Well,' I said, 'it will give a fee simple title to the Aboriginal people.' And they said, 'It is has never happened before.'

And I said: 'Well, let's do it for the very first time.'

And so those title deeds give fee simple title to the Aboriginal people.

It's a fundamental difference to what is given by the *Native Title Act*, regrettably in my opinion, because the *Native Title Act* does not give full recognition of land rights to Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders.

That title and that Act owe so much to Galarrwuy Yunupingu and the leadership that he gave to the Northern Land Council during those days.

I regard it as a great personal privilege to have known Galarrwuy and a great personal privilege to be invited here tonight to celebrate his 27 years with the NLC.'

Norman Fry – 'Those of us born in the 50s, 60s, and 70s, we know that prior to the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act* and the struggle of the Gove mining case, life in Australia as an Aborigine or Torres Strait Islander was not that flash at all.

In fact, people were pretty much under the thumb, to speak up, to talk up, was a very difficult thing to do.

Apart from Charlie Perkins and Galarrwuy, they made all of us feel, not only that we had something to offer, but that we were part of the human race because it was not that long ago that we weren't even citizens of this country.

The Gove mining case comes out of that backdrop.

For Galarrwuy to stand up as a young man, and to lead for all of us, not only talks about his own commitment and his own courage, but as I said previously, if you tell the truth, if you believe in what you say, and above all be committed to it, people will not only respect you, but that particular cause wins respect.

Galarrwuy you have made us all feel proud to be blackfullas, you have made white Australians feel proud to be Australians because of the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act*.

You are in the psyche of all of us.'

Ted Egan – 'If there's anyone deserving of a rest it's Galarrwuy because he has been around much longer than his Northern Land Council career.

The moment he returned from school it was around the time of the Bark Petition being presented, and he was immediately thrust into a political turmoil that has go on ever since, he has not had a private moment in 40 years, and he deserves some wonderful time with his magnificent family.

He comes from a long line of warriors and conciliators, which is a wonderful combination.

People who know what they stand for, and people who want a fair go for everybody, and his father was one of the great men of Arnhem Land.'

Galarrwuy Yunupingu – 'I don't want to show any emotional feelings, even though I feel it. I think we been together too long.

I am not standing up here to cry.

I will not cry.

I'm a big man, I'm a grown man.

I been around this place too long to be crying.

I'd rather challenge than cry. I'd rather fight than cry.'

'When I walk out that door, I will make a little hole in it, because I will be listening through that hole, and I'll be looking through that hole,

looking to see who is tricking our people, and when I come back, I come back to choke you, not half-way, I choke you properly.

I will be watching through that little hole, and I'll quietly tell you that you are doing your job or that you are not doing your job.'

'In my time, I have seen many (NT) chief ministers come and go, except one, Shane Stone.

He came back (to the NT for the tribute dinner) specially to do up my bow-tie, and he had the guts to tell me that this is the closest he got to strangling me.

I reckon that's honest.

There was honesty between he and I.

When he said he wanted to strangle me, I said: 'That's the most honest thing you've said to me'.'

'The Northern Land Council is in readiness to take on any challenges, whether it comes from the NT Government or people from down south who want to develop Aboriginal land.

There has to be a balance, equal partnerships, done face-to-face, not just 'They're only blackfullas just give them royalties or pocket money, and then the rest can go on the welfare service.'

Don't ever let this happen in my absence!

'To the people of authority in this room, please try and help our people come to an equal footing to build the Northern Territory for our future.'