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Elimatta

Autumn 2013

Aboriginal Support Group – Manly Warringah Pittwater

ASG acknowledges the Guringai People, the traditional owners of the lands and the waters of this area

CONGRATULATIONS TO HIGH ACHIEVERS OF 2013



Shane Phillips
Australia's Local Hero 2013 and Indigenous Community Leader

Shane at age 48 is a respected member of the Redfern Aboriginal Community in Sydney and is regarded as the voice of the community on issues including juvenile justice and Aboriginal deaths in custody. He is the full

time CEO of the *Tribal Warrior Association*, a non-profit organisation that offers training for employment and helps at the grassroots level with emergency relief for struggling families. Shane also operates a mentor program to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, and is also credited with vastly improving the relationship between his Indigenous community and the police. Since 2009 the number of robberies committed by local youth has declined by 80 per cent. **Shane is our special guest at the ASG Information Night on Monday March 11 – See What's On page 12.**

Jill Gallagher OA



Jill Gallagher is humbled by her *Order of Australia* for distinguished service to Victoria's indigenous community, and is not about to rest on her laurels – there's still a lot of work to be done. As head of the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation for the past 12 years, she has

seen her people face increasingly dire health challenges since she joined the organisation in 1992. She says there are many factors, beyond access to health services that contribute to the disparity. "If you're going to close the life expectancy gap you've got to look at education and employment opportunities. Anyone whether you're black or white, if you've got a job you're going to be a lot more healthy. My passion is actually for us as Aboriginal people to be recognised and valued as Aboriginal Australians and to enjoy the same benefits that this country offers as non-indigenous Australians."

Jill Stark SMH January 29



Rodney Streater
Scholarship for Medicine

18 year old Warriewood resident Rodney Streater has been awarded a Puggy Hunter Memorial Scholarship. "This scholarship is a massive privilege and I feel honoured to have been awarded it. It now makes my study at lot

more stress free and lowers the financial burden so that I can focus properly on my study." The Scheme is funded by Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, and aims to encourage and assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander undergraduate students in health-related disciplines to complete their studies and join the health workforce. The scholarship provides financial assistance to 100 Indigenous students and will enable Rodney to study at Newcastle University in his chosen field of medicine. He will spend part of the five year degree working in rural areas.



Akram Azimi
Young Australian Of The Year 2013

Now 25 years of age and resident of Marangaroo in Western Australia, Akram first arrived in 1999 from Afghanistan as a refugee. His journey in Australia took him from 'an ostracised

refugee kid with no prospects' to becoming his school's head boy. An outstanding student at Warwick Senior High School, he topped the tertiary entrance exam scores among his classmates. He's now studying a triple major: Law, Science and Arts at the University of WA. His philanthropic roles have included working with *True Blue Dreaming*, which helps disadvantaged remote Indigenous communities. For three years, Akram has been a mentor for young Indigenous people in the Looma community in the Kimberley region, and has mentored primary school students in the small farming community of Wyalkatchem, in WA's wheat belt. Akram is also a mentor for a Special Olympics athlete to help raise community awareness of disability issues.



Aboriginal Heritage Work Recognised

Volunteers that monitor Aboriginal sites across Northern Sydney have been recognised in this year's *Heritage Volunteer Award*. Aboriginal Heritage

Office manager David Watts said most of the sites are monitored by more than 50 volunteers who are keen bush walkers on the northern beaches.

Environment minister Robyn Parker said there is no comparable project anywhere else in Australia. "Not only do the volunteers provide the legwork for the monitoring; they also contribute to promoting the program and raising community awareness of the value of Aboriginal Heritage" she said.

If you would like to be a Heritage Volunteer, the next Volunteer Monitors Training day will be held on Wednesday 27th February. Please call 9949 9882 or go to the web site: <http://www.aboriginalheritage.org/>

Congratulations to Ravenswood School

Ravenswood School was a winner in the AHO Poster Competition to design a poster with the topic Protecting Aboriginal Heritage.

They will be presented with their prize of a *Yidaki* (didgeridoo) for the school and individual gifts for their poster entries on Monday 18th February.

NSW Aboriginal Health Plan 2013 – 2023

The NSW Minister of Health released the NSW Aboriginal Health Plan 2013 – 2023, which outlines a vision, goal and strategic direction for the State's health system.

The goal of the NSW Aboriginal Health Plan 2013 – 2023 is to meet the challenge of closing the health gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. It will provide strategic direction to the NSW Ministry of Health as to how Aboriginal health should be organised, funded and delivered over the next ten years. Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, The Hon. Victor Dominello MP, said the plan was an important step towards a healthier outlook for the State's Aboriginal communities. The Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW (AH&MRC) has welcomed the new direction for health care for Aboriginal people.

The Chief Health Officer's report: The health of Aboriginal people of NSW: Report of the Chief Health Officer 2012 was also released. The health of Aboriginal people of NSW report provides important information on the health of Aboriginal people in NSW and details progress towards key NSW and national closing the gap targets.

Councils are encouraged to circulate the following information available online:

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/publications/Pages/nsw-aboriginal-health-plan-2013-2023.aspx>

Indigenous Australians should be able to elect Indigenous Senators



Geoffrey Robertson QC told *Living Black* presenter Karla Grant that Australia lags behind other countries when it comes to recognising the rights of Aboriginal people.

"Other countries have acknowledged rights of

Indigenous people in far more satisfactory ways," says Robertson. "I've always believed that the best way to [recognise their rights] is to allow Indigenous people to vote for their own representatives; to have Australian senators elected by the Indigenous community."

Under New Zealand's mixed member proportional (MMP) system, which was introduced in 1867, seven seats are reserved for Māori members who are elected through a separate Māori electorate roll.

In a special edition of *Living Black*, Robertson said he would like to see more Aboriginal leaders be a part of Australia's Parliament.

"Whether it's Noel Pearson or Marcia Langton, Larissa Behrendt or Mick Dodson, or any of those

people would seem to me to be far more impressive and dignified. "We could be really proud if they were Senators and a part of the governing of Australia."

While Australia has come a long way, especially with the launch of the nation's first free-to-air Indigenous channel this week, Robertson says we still have a long way to go. He believes 'true equality' will only start when there is constitutional recognition of Indigenous people.

"[We've] still got a way to go before we can compete with other countries and before we can honour international law which requires that Indigenous people have rights. It's not enough to throw money at what it's seen as 'Aboriginal problems'. You have to begin by giving Aboriginal people true equality," he says.

"You have to start by recognising them in the Constitution, by recognising the amount that they have given to Australians."

Watch the interview in full at:

<http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/1720329/Indigenous-Aussies-should-vote-for-their-own-senat>

A Decision to Discriminate: Aboriginal Disempowerment in the Northern Territory

Published by *concerned Australians* Oct 2012

A Decision to Discriminate is the latest book in a series of highly regarded publications by *concerned Australians*. These include *This Is What We Said*, *Walk With Us* and *NT Consultations Report 2011: By Quotations*.

A Decision to Discriminate demonstrates how our democratic processes failed Aboriginal peoples of the Northern Territory. It shows the process leading to decisions which were deeply flawed; a process miserably failing the people who provided evidence to its inquiries by ignoring their clearly expressed views and instead pushing the legislation through the House of Representatives before the Senate Inquiry report had been completed.

The events described here took their origins in 2007, when the government introduced the “Northern Territory Emergency Response” (NTER, commonly known as *NT Intervention*). This measure was set to last for 5 years, and shortly before its end of term the parliament passed a new legislation, *Stronger Futures* on 29 June 2012. This legislation imposes discriminatory legislation on Aboriginal peoples of the Northern Territory, effectively extending the failed Northern Territory *Intervention* for another ten years.

The responsible Minister, Jenny Macklin, gives as the reason for the new legislation: “Well the message loud and clear from Aboriginal people, from parents and grandparents is that they want this.”

There were over 450 submissions to the Senate Inquiry into the *Stronger Futures* Bills, coming from a diverse range of people and organisations including Aboriginal communities, lawyers, welfare agencies, human rights groups and churches. The vast majority were highly critical of the Bills, e.g. Dr Gondarra OAM, Dhurili Clan Nation said: “... please do not let us down and say, ‘This is the legislation we are going to deal with, because the Aboriginal people are naughty boys and naughty girls and so we need to look after them and we need to treat them this way.’ No, we do not need that. We are not a puppet on a string. You do not play around with us. We want to be a free people. We want to determine our dignity and pride in being a people.

That is the message that we are giving.” Even some politicians acknowledged the rejection of these Bills, eg, Senator Scullion, the Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs, when he said: “When we get to most communities any observer would say that Aboriginal people more generally hate the Intervention. They do not like it, it invades their rights and they feel discriminated against.”

Despite of all the evidence and a huge number of voices speaking out against the *Stronger Futures* legislation, it received bipartisan support in both houses of the parliament and was passed with almost no opposition.

The Hon. Alastair Nicholson AO in the foreword to the book makes the point, “What I find almost equally disturbing as the policy of ignoring the participation and input of Aboriginal people into the decision making process is Government willingness to perpetuate and cloak racial discrimination against them as so called ‘special measures’ purporting to protect them, while at the same time abandoning any semblance of compliance with international obligations.”

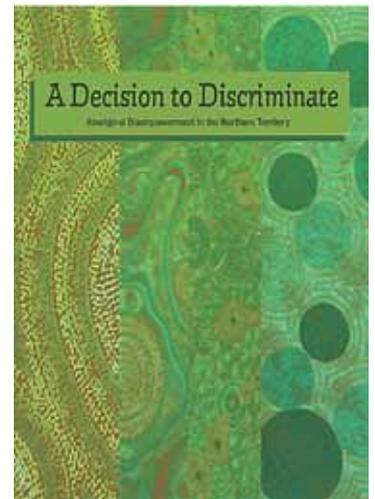
Unfortunately the voices of Aboriginal peoples are seldom heard in the public domain. In the tradition of its predecessors this book uses quotes as a way of recording what the people have said.

Further information:

<http://www.concernedaustralians.com.au/> and <http://www.respectandlisten.org/nt-intervention/concerned-australians/a-decision-to-discriminate.html>

To order the book online:

http://www.concernedaustralians.com.au/media/ADTD_Order_Form.pdf



Are you watching NITV?

Channel 34 on free-to-air or Channel 180 on Pay TV.
<http://www.nitv.org.au/>



**Who were the first
Aboriginals
to be granted
citizenship?**

(Answer on Page 11)

LANDMARK STOLEN GENERATION TRIAL BEGINS

A first-of-its-kind trial has begun in Perth this week throwing into question legal duties the state may have owed members of the *stolen generation* in W.A.

Seven siblings and their now-elderly parents, whose Wheatbelt-based family was torn apart between 1958 and 1961, have been listed as plaintiffs in the lawsuit. The action is a test case in WA, although similar cases have been mounted in South Australian and the ACT.

Representing the family, Greg McIntyre previously acted as solicitor for the late Eddie Koiki Mabo in the landmark case that ended the *terra nullius* myth that Australia belonged to no one before its discovery by white people. Mr McIntyre told the Supreme Court of WA on Monday the details of the children's removal from their parents and separation from each other were not in dispute.

The government's legislative power to remove Aboriginal children from their families in the 50s and 60s was also not to be questioned during the five-week trial.

Instead he argued the state had taken a guardian role over the children when they were taken into care, and with that role came certain fiduciary duties, which they alleged were breached.

Mr McIntyre claims these duties were reflected in the wording of the 1905 Aborigines Act and involved a duty of guardianship to "promote the welfare of Aborigines".

The state failed to take into account the damage removing a child from its natural parents could cause and to provide the appropriate care and counselling for the children once they were removed, Mr McIntyre argued.

The Supreme Court of WA heard of the unstable years for many of the children after they were taken from their parents.

Taken as infants or young children, most of the siblings were shipped between homes every couple of months, if not weeks or days, over the course of their formative years, the court heard.

Although almost all of the children were placed in the same home for several years, they did not know they had siblings until they were in their teens, Mr McIntyre said in his opening address.

He alleged two of the siblings were subjected to sexual abuse at the hands of their carers or carer's children in a number of homes.

Another sibling who was placed in a *good* home immediately after being taken into state care struggles with identity issues, he said.

"She was and remains damaged emotionally and psychologically," Mr McIntyre said.

He said the government's decision to take this girl while her parents were at work was "a classic instance of the government acting in a way which ignores the important role the natural parents play in the making of a person. It's not something that was unknown, even in 1958," he said.

The case was lodged on Sorry Day in 2010, two years after the Aboriginal Legal Service and law firm Lavan Legal started looking into hundreds of stolen generation cases in WA.

On Monday, Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia chief executive Dennis Eggington said the case had important significance – not only for the plaintiff's family, but for the thousands of Aboriginal people who were also stolen from their families.

"The effects of being forcibly removed from families have had heartbreaking inter-generational effects on so many of our people," he said.

"This is a historical day as we embark upon a hearing that has the capacity to right the wrongs of the past."

Rania Spooner

*Court and Crime Reporter WA News
February 5, 2013*

BIALA HOSTEL 2012 GRADUATION CEREMONY

I was very fortunate again to be invited by Lara Rutley, the house manager at Biala to attend the 2012 Aboriginal Hostel graduation ceremony. This year the event was hosted by Kirinani Hostel, Newcastle and held the local RSL Club.

As usual, all the girls were very excited and all beautifully dressed and groomed and ready to make their grand entrance. There were no year 12 students from Biala but there were several who had completed year 10 and there were students from the other hostels in Newcastle, Sylvania and Dubbo who had finished their year 12 education.

All the Biala girls present at the ceremony including Janie, Nadia, Crystal, Teleisha, Margaret, Charlie, Pam, Amanda, Beverley, Mackayla, Tarminya and Maddie had a great night and it was nice that some of their families were able to attend.

It was a long drive home from Newcastle and I think all the girls fell asleep in the bus on the trip back.

Next year the graduation will be held in Dubbo and I think Lara will be doing some fundraising during this year so that they can stay in Dubbo for the weekend of the graduation.

Thanks to Lara and the girls and also Di and Angela, staff members, I also had a really enjoyable night. Congratulations to Lara and her staff for another successful year. I know that they had all been very busy supervising and caring for all the girls who spent time at Biala in 2012. I am sure that 2013 will also be a great year for them all.

Carol Ritchie



BUSH TO BEACH 2013

South Narrabeen Surf Club hosted its eighth *Bush to Beach* on 25th to 28th January – an opportunity for the children from a remote NSW town to do things we on the Northern Beaches take for granted.

Elders Joyce and Les Doole from the Brewarrina community – a place with a population of 1200, situated 850 kilometers northwest of Sydney – came down with 40 local boys and girls keen to enjoy and explore Narrabeen beach.

It was a hectic four day schedule and these are just some of the activities that were enjoyed by the mob from Brewarrina:

- Friday: 9am Arrive at Surf Club. Surf awareness and safety talk by Warringah Lifeguard. BBQ lunch assisted by staff from Ausgrid – NRL players invited. 6pm Dinner at surf club followed by Karaoke night.
- Saturday: 9am Manly Surf School surf board riding lessons. 12.30pm Manly Water Works and Manly Aquarium. 6pm big night out with a semi-formal dinner for 120 guests.
- Sunday: 9am activities with the local nippers, swimming and running races etc. The night included Karaoke and dancing with pizza and salad for dinner.
- Monday: 10am Packing the bus for return trip to Brewarrina.



Photo courtesy Michael Mannington Pittwateronlinenews.com

This was all made possible thanks to the generous assistance from many sponsors and the ongoing dedication from some very special local businesses – and of course volunteers from the surf club and the Elders from Brewarrina and the Aunty from Weilmoringle.

One sponsor, Variety Club President and Collaroy resident Jack Cannons AM says, “The breakdown of the barrier between black and white is not only good for the aboriginal people – it’s good for the white people on the beaches.”

The Aboriginal Support Group – Manly Warringah Pittwater thanks the South Narrabeen Surf Club for their help in *closing the gap*.

For more information about next year’s event: <http://southnarrabeensurfclub.org/bush-to-the-beach>

Lake Eyre regains its Aboriginal name *Kati Thanda*

Kati Thanda-Lake Eyre previously known as Lake Eyre is the lowest point in Australia, at approximately 15m below sea level. On the rare occasions that it fills, it’s the largest lake in Australia and 18th largest in the world. It is the depocenter of the vast Lake Eyre Basin and is found in South Australia, some 700km north of Adelaide. The lake was named in honour of Edward John Eyre, who was the first European to view it in 1840. The lake’s official name was changed on 19th December 2012 to combine the name *Lake Eyre* with the Indigenous name *Kati Thanda*. The traditional owners of the lake are the Arabuna.

Kati Thanda-Lake Eyre basin is a drainage basin that covers just under one-sixth of all Australia. The Kati Thanda-Lake Eyre basin is the largest endorheic basin in Australia and amongst the largest in the world, covering about 1,200,000 square kilometres, including much of inland Queensland, large portions of South Australia and the Northern Territory, and a part of western New South Wales. The Lake Eyre basin is one of four sub-basins of the larger Great Artesian Basin.

Originally forming in the early *Paleogene* (about 60 million years ago) when south-eastern South Australia started to sink – the Basin continues to sink gradually and accumulate sediment.

For several million years the Lake Eyre Basin was well supplied with water and largely forested. About 20 million years ago, large shallow lakes covered much of the area, but as our continent drifted further north and the climate became more arid, these lakes and floodplains started to dry. Only in the last 2.6 million years did the onset of the ice ages bring about the present climatic regime and the consequent fairly rapid desertification of the area.



Fire destroys Ghost Gum trees beloved by Aboriginal artist

Two iconic Ghost Gum trees painted many times by famed Aboriginal artist Albert Namatjira have been burnt down just as they were being considered for inclusion on a heritage register.

Northern Territory's Minister for Indigenous Advancement Alison Anderson said police believe arsonists set ablaze the trees, which stood 16 kilometres from the outback town of Alice Springs.

The December 30 fire had destroyed "a special place that has been visited by many since Albert Namatjira won international acclaim", she said. "The Ghost Gums featured in many of his works and were easily accessible on the road to Hermannsburg, where he was born in 1902," the minister said. "The twins Ghost Gums were a wonderful reminder of his connection to the land."

Anderson said it was only recently that the Northern Territory government had completed work around the trees to try to protect them from bush fires and allow as much moisture as possible to get to their roots.

The heritage branch of the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment had also requested a meeting with the traditional owners to discuss the future of the site.

The department said the ghost gums were being considered for inclusion on the heritage register at the time of their destruction.

Anderson said the trees were special not only to Aboriginal people but to those who loved the work of Namatjira, whose landscape paintings brought Outback deserts to colourful life. "In his watercolours he brought the beauty of the Central Australian landscape to the world and helped make it a symbol of Australian identity," Anderson said.

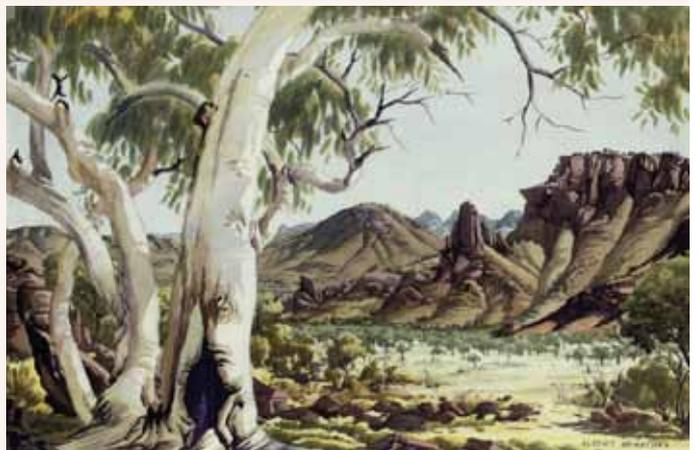
Flip Prior, The West Australian October 6, 2012

Image Top: The Valley Macdonnell Ranges – Albert Namatjira

Centre: The iconic trees before the fire

Photo courtesy Sue Barker

Bottom: Photo courtesy AFP © taken on January 3, 2013 and released with permission from the NT Government.



**ASG-MWP helps raise \$1,690
– THANKYOU !!!**



The Australian Literacy & Numeracy Foundation

WALLOFHANDS



And a BIG THANKYOU from the Kids from Ali-Curung!

Closing the Indigenous literacy gap takes time but being able to read and write is a basic human right. For three years now, thousands of *Wall of Hands* supporters have been helping the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation in communities around Australia. We look forward to your ongoing support in extending our literacy programs for the children of Ali-Curung in the Northern Territory in 2013.

www.wallofhands.com.au/Wall/View/3551

FRESH START WITH NEW SCHOOL ON THE BLOCK

Eight-year-old Breanna Riley was the first student from Sydney's newest school to arrive and pick up her uniform on Friday. "She rang the whole family and said, 'I'm going to a new school'," said her mother, Michelle. "She said, 'There's *blackfellas* in the school'."

What we're aiming for is to have this education where the children will have a love of learning, of pride in their own Aboriginality and from there on we can choose the right school for them in secondary education.

This week an all-Aboriginal urban primary school, believed to be the first of its kind, will open in Redfern.

Redfern Jarjum College was the dream of Jesuit community advocate and volunteer of 25 years Ailsa Gillett, who runs free breakfast and outreach programs for indigenous children in the inner-city suburb.

"I could see all these wonderful, spirited, talented young kids in different areas who were missing their education for any number of reasons," she said.

Originally sponsored by St Aloysius College, where Ms Gillett works as an executive assistant, the school has also been made possible by support from the Catholic Block Grant Authority, the Sydney Archdiocese and donations from the Jesuit community.

A \$2.8 million refurbishment of the school building, which sits next to the St Vincent de Paul Catholic Church on Redfern Street and was once popular with squatters, is still a week from completion, so the first three days of classes will be off-site.

The principal, Beatrice Sheen, who is Aboriginal, said it had been a "privilege and an honour" to help develop the school and its curriculum over the past two years.

The first intake of 17 students comes from all levels of primary school, with four in kindergarten. Most have struggled, in different ways, at other schools.



Small class sizes and individual learning plans would be key to its success, Ms Sheen said.

"Schools do not cater for Aboriginal students," she said. "The classes are too big and they can't concentrate on a little group."

Students will be transported to and from school, and uniforms, lunches and other activities are also included as part of a child's free enrolment.

An Aboriginal advisory group has been set up to advise the school council on cultural issues.

Ms Riley said the commitment to teaching kids about their heritage and culture was one of the reasons she moved Breanna from a nearby Catholic school to Jarjum. Little things, such as being served her people's totem animal - the kangaroo - for lunch, would not be a problem here, she said.

"That's all part of reconciliation, too," she said.

Ms Gillett said it was almost hard to believe the dream was coming to fruition.

"What we're aiming for is to have this education where the children will have a love of learning, of pride in their own Aboriginality and from there on we can choose the right school for them in secondary education," she said.

*Josephine Tovey, Education Editor SMH
January 29, 2013*

The Aboriginal Flag flies with pride Australia Day 2013



Australia Day 2013 marks the first time that both the Australian and the Aboriginal flags have flown side by side on the Harbour Bridge on Australia Day.

In a ceremony hosted by Rhoda Roberts, head of indigenous programming for the Sydney Opera House, both flags were raised simultaneously to commemorate the beginning of the Australia Day festivities.

The flags were ushered up the Harbour Bridge by a performance of the *Creation Stick Procession*. The performance depicted the creation process where Dhurumulun, son of Biyami the creator, was sent down to Earth with one wooden leg which left holes in the ground; it is from these holes in which all life came.

The ceremony was attended by her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir AC CVO Governor of NSW, Aboriginal Elder and Aboriginal Land Council representative Charles Madden and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Victor Dominello.

Story continued on Page 10

Nancy Wood, Angela Rosenstein and Carol Ritchie represented the ASG-MWP at the 2012 NSW Reconciliation Council's AGM held on 3rd November at Tranby Aboriginal College in Glebe.

The Council gave the Annual Report for 2012. Highlights of the year included National Reconciliation Week which continues to raise awareness of *reconciliation* and the Council held three key events which included a commemoration to mark *Sorry Day* on 26th May 2012.

The Council also joined the Justice Reinvestment for Aboriginal Young People campaign – this campaign seeks to reduce the over-representation of young Aboriginal people who are incarcerated in NSW.

The Council also collaborated with Tranby and the local community by holding events in March and April to explore Aboriginal culture, art and social justice.

In addition, the 100 year commemoration of the Cootamundra Girls Training Home was supported.

Some of the Council's achievements included a Strategic Plan for 2013-2018, having a much larger participation in the Schools Reconciliation Challenge, build a relationship with *You Me Unity* in regard to the Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal people, and also changed their rules to include individual membership and to apply to qualify for tax deductible donations.

Priorities for 2013 include improving communication across NSW, continuing the push for recognition in the Constitution, Supporting the Justice Reinvestment campaign, and working more in regional NSW.

The new Management Committee for 2012-2013 was then voted on. The new Indigenous co-chair is Carla McGrath, the non-Indigenous co-chair is Kate Brennan, continuing Treasurer is Megan Wallace, Secretary is Dominic Wykanak, Indigenous ordinary members are Auntie Joan Tranta and Glen Crump (who were elected in a later ballot) and non-Indigenous ordinary members are Sylvia Arzey and Lachlan Macara.

In the afternoon there were two very interesting workshops – one was in regard to the proposed Constitutional referendum to recognise Aboriginal people, the other was given by Shane Phillips who spoke about the Tribal Warrior Association and its community work and also some early history of the Redfern area. The goals of the NSW Reconciliation Council are:

- Strengthen the People's Reconciliation movement in New South Wales.
- Raise community awareness and understanding.
- Promote social justice, equity and rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Their vision is: *A Reconciled Australia.*

The Council is run by a very talented and dedicated staff and board. The AGM is always a very interesting and enjoyable day to attend to learn more about the culture of Aboriginal people.

Carol Ritchie

Non-Registration of Aboriginal births still prevalent

It is shocking to learn that the non-registration of Aboriginal births remains so prevalent in a wealthy country like Australia, writes Dr Paula Gerber.

When did we stop denying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's Australian citizenship? Most of you probably think the answer is 1967, following the referendum to amend the constitution.

However, the fact is that in 2012, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples still struggle to enjoy full citizenship in Australia. This is because of problems they experience accessing a birth certificate – the document universally recognised as being the key to accessing citizenship rights. Not having a birth certificate is the equivalent of being legally invisible.

Without a birth certificate, it is impossible to obtain a passport or driver's license, and may be difficult to open a bank account, access social security, or obtain a tax file number. Without a birth certificate, some parents have even struggled to enrol their children in school.

The problem that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experience in trying to obtain a birth certificate arises in one of two ways:

- 1 Their birth was never registered; or
2. Their birth was registered, but their parent(s) did not purchase a birth certificate at that time, and now the person is unable to satisfy the rigorous ID requirements that are a condition to obtaining a copy of your birth certificate. This is because the primary documents accepted by the Registrars of Births, Deaths and Marriages as proof of ID are a passport and a driver's licence – two documents which a person without a birth certificate cannot obtain.

Research is needed into the precise number of unregistered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander births in Australia, but preliminary investigations reveal it is in the thousands. Research is also needed into the reasons behind this under-registration. Anecdotal evidence suggests there may be a multitude of reasons including:

- **Fees** – while registering a birth is free, obtaining a birth certificate costs between \$26 and \$50, depending on which state or territory the birth occurred in. Compare this with the UK, where a birth certificate costs four pounds sterling (AU\$6).

Story continued on Page 11

Indigenous Australian Engineering Summer School

Engineering empowers Indigenous Australians to develop their own communities in a way that is consistent with their cultural values yet indigenous people are underrepresented in this profession.

The Indigenous Australian Engineering Summer School (IAESS) has been addressing this imbalance for the past seventeen years. Each January students are selected to live in at one of the universities for a full week. This year's summer school was held at Sydney University and students came from all parts of mainland Australia as well as Tasmania and Torres Strait.

Throughout the programme students participate in daily activities which provide them with an understanding of what the different engineering disciplines involve: entrance and syllabus requirements as well employment prospects are all covered. They also meet with sponsors from various engineering disciplines and have an opportunity to visit a number of key engineering projects and establishments. Activities ranged from a visit to the Royal Australian Navy Heritage Centre at Garden Island, climbing the Harbour Bridge, the flight simulator at QANTAS, Manly Water Works as well as the Engineering Faculty at Sydney University.

Students are also given an introduction to the social skills required by professional engineers through various networking functions. These were held at Garden Island Naval Museum and a graduation dinner at Sydney University. They provided students with an opportunity to discuss the different types of engineering on offer as well as possible scholarships and cadetships with corporate representatives.

The IAESS was the concept of the late Jeff Dobell who had a 'vision of nation building' and who better to lead the charge than the people who are the original inhabitants. Each year a new group of graduates are inspired to study engineering.



Todd Rowling (left) and Ben Lange (right) outside government house Sydney.

A number of well known figures support the programme including The Hon Bob Hawke AC, who is the patron and journalist Dr Jeff McMullen.

Students who have benefited from the programme and who are now qualified engineers also come back to help mentor the younger students. Pictured are Todd Rowling and Ben Lange who both successfully completed their Electrical Engineering degrees and are currently employed with Ausgrid: an inaugural sponsor of the IAESS.

Any Indigenous student who is currently studying in the years of 10 to 12 can apply. Application forms and further information about the programme can be accessed via: <http://engineeringaid.org/>

I am sure anyone who is fortunate enough to be selected for the school will be inspired to pursue a career in engineering.

Article by Brett Rowling.

Protect sacred Aboriginal burial grounds IN THE KIMBERLEY

The WA State government has given permission for Woodside's proposed gas plant to disturb ancient burial grounds in the dunes near James Price Point (Walmadany) despite findings by a previous State Government that these sites must be protected for environmental and cultural heritage reasons.

Traditional owner Teresa Roe says, "My spirit comes from this country. My sister was stolen by welfare so my parents hid me, so I could be raised on country with my culture. I raised 9 of my own children and 8 of my sister's children after she passed away. My sons are the law men for this country. They have the responsibility to protect it. They hold the songs, the stories. Our ancestors are

buried in those dunes.

No one would allow a whitefellas cemetery to be dug up so why here. When

Tony Burke sat down with us he looked me in the eye, and I told him "I kept my country alive... I don't want anybody destroying it. I don't want the money; I want the country and my spirit.

The state government has failed us. We need Tony Burke to step in and act."

<http://www.indymedia.org.au/2013/01/20/goolarabooloo-law-bosses-lift-the-ante-in-battle-with-woodside-over-gas-hub>



After my trek west of Alice Springs in July, I arrived in Darwin to meet my husband Peter, and eldest son Josh, to check out some more of the Northern Territory. We stayed in Darwin for 10 nights, which I thought would be too long, but there is so much to do it was perfect. It's a great city and *tourist central!*

We went swimming in the wave pool on Darwin's harbour front, visited *Crococaurus Cove* – a huge display of reptiles and crocodiles, Mindil markets, Parap markets, Aboriginal art shops, the Darwin Museum, deep sea fishing, the Old Aeroplane Museum, war bunkers – also dining at some terrific restaurants, sampling fresh local foods including crocodile, buffalo, seafood – and enjoyed meeting some of the friendly locals.

We then picked up a car and headed east to Kakadu. Our first stop was Cooinda, an amazing area near the *Yellow Water* billabong. We took a cruise on the billabong and enjoyed an incredible display of birds, crocodiles, flora and a gorgeous sunset too. The water lilies were spectacular, with water droplets on the leaves glistening in the sun.

Next day we drove on to Nourlangie Rock and spotted a *black rock* wallaby on our way up, along with some beautiful native flowers and trees. The trip to the top was very worthwhile showing a breathtaking view

across the country. We stopped on the way back at another lookout to gain a totally different view of the land. A freezing pool swim helped cool us down after a hot day, unfortunately in a man-made pool as it isn't safe to swim in waterholes along the way.

After a terrific couple of days we travelled on to Jabiru. Next day we drove to Ubirr and saw some incredible rock art which was explained to us by an Aboriginal Ranger. When the stories were explained they seemed so logical. A Japanese film crew were also shooting on location, providing the opportunity to hear another interpretation of the rock art by one of the *traditional owners* of the land. At the days end the sunset over the savannah was absolutely breathtaking.

I visited a *women's business* sacred site on one of our walks. It was very eerie and, as I was the only person there, an incredible experience too. There was a sign explaining the story and how men were not permitted.

On our way back to the airport we dropped in at the Humpty Doo Hotel, just to round-off our Northern Territory experience.

Australia's top end is amazing country and if you ever get the chance it is well worth the experience!

Sue Barber



The incredible rock art of Ubirr – Photo courtesy of Sue Barber

The Aboriginal Flag

flies with pride

Australia Day 2013 Story continued from Page 7

Ms Bashir spoke about the moving nature of the event and that this is an important symbol in recognising the Aboriginal people. "This is a very moving, deeply felt experience, to be here with you all this morning because it does denote so much symbolism and actual reality of the longest living civilisation of this planet. Lives were changed with the arrival right here of the First Fleet."

"I'm pleased to be here today to witness an historic event, the raising of two flags on Australia day," Mr Madden said.

Mr Dominello believes that this is how every Australia Day should begin and hopes this ceremony becomes a nationwide tradition.

"I think it's critical, the reality is that the Aboriginal people are the first Australians and you can go anywhere around the world and you will never see the Aboriginal culture, it is uniquely Australian.

"So when we celebrate all that it is to be Australian, part of our collective DNA is our Aboriginal culture, I think it's very appropriate that we start Australia day like this."

Sarah Homewood SMH January 26, 2013

Non-Registration of Aboriginal births still prevalent

- **Awareness** – is there sufficient understanding within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities of the importance of a registering a birth and obtaining a birth certificate?
- **Literacy/Language** – there may be language barriers or literacy issues in completing the birth registration process.
- **Confidence** – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples may lack confidence in dealing with authorities and are often marginalised from mainstream services.
- **Distrust of Authorities** – there may be a general suspicion of authorities amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples stemming, in part, from the policies that led to the *Stolen Generations*.

The problems that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experience trying to obtain a birth certificate, is starting to receive international attention. This is because several international human rights treaties, to which Australia is a party, expressly provide that every person has a right to have their birth registered.

The failure of Australian governments to ensure that the births of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are registered amounts to non-compliance with our treaty obligations. Thus, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child recently stated: The Committee urges the State party to review its birth registration process in detail to ensure that all children born in Australia are registered at birth, and that no child is disadvantaged due to procedural barriers to registration, including by raising awareness among the Aboriginal population on the importance of birth registration and providing special support to facilitate birth registration for illiterate persons. It further urges the State party to issue birth certificates upon the birth of a child and for free. This is a damning indictment on Australia, because non-registration of births is something that has

traditionally been understood as being a problem unique to the developing world. International children's rights organisations such as UNICEF and Plan International constantly run campaigns to increase birth registration in developing countries such as Bangladesh, Cambodia, Nepal and Malawi. It is shocking to discover that a wealthy, OECD country such as Australia has similar problems with under-registration of the births of a minority group.

Work is being done to try to understand the underlying causes of the problem, and what can be done to fix it. A Monash University-led interdisciplinary team is conducting research into this issue in Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory pursuant to an ARC linkage grant entitled *Closing the Gap on Indigenous Birth Registration*. In addition, the Victorian Law Reform Commission is currently under-taking a community consultation into the situation in Victoria.

In rural NSW, moves are underway to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school children all have birth certificates. A birth registration 'drive' is being held in three Armidale primary schools on November 6-8, 2012.

A trial of this initiative was held last year and resulted in 300 births being registered in one day. Students at the University of New England have raised funds to pay for a further 300 birth certificates for Aboriginal people, and this year the program has been extended to siblings and other family members, so that adults also have the opportunity to have their births registered.

The extent of unregistered births of Aboriginal children in the Armidale region was discovered when an organisation teaching financial literacy skills to children realised that large numbers of Aboriginal children were unable to open a bank account because they didn't have a birth certificate.

Perhaps all the international and local attention this problem is beginning to receive will mean that some day Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples will be able to readily obtain a birth certificate, and enjoy all the rights and benefits that flow from being an Australian citizen.



The first Aboriginal people granted Australian citizenship were the famous painter Albert Namatjira and his wife Iikalita in 1957

Albert's first exhibition in Melbourne (1938) sold out and exhibitions in Adelaide and Sydney drew similar enthusiasm. He was awarded Queen Elizabeth II's *Coronation Medal* (1953), presented to the Queen in Canberra (1954) and elected an honorary member of the Royal Art Society of NSW (1955).

Albert's success brought money – and he planned to secure a future for his family by leasing a cattle station – but as an Aboriginal he wasn't allowed. Next he tried to build a house in Alice Springs but again the white man's law prevented him.

Public outrage at Albert's predicament pushed the

Government to grant him and his wife full citizenship in 1957, which meant they could vote, enter a hotel and build a house anywhere they chose.

It took ten years for the government to grant similar rights to the rest of the Aboriginal population.

As a citizen Albert could now also buy alcohol, and in keeping with Aboriginal custom his Indigenous friends expected him to share it – but in doing so was charged by Police and convicted in 1958. After spending two months in prison, Albert emerged a free but broken man, dying soon after of heart disease complicated by pneumonia in 1959. He was just fifty-seven years old. (1902-1959)



Monday March 11
7.30pm start

ASG-MWP Information Night – All Welcome.
Guest Speaker: Shane Phillips

Learn about the Tribal Warriors and Shane's mentor program. Shane Phillips is Australia's Local Hero 2013 Indigenous community leader. He is the full time CEO of the Tribal Warrior Association, a non-profit organisation directed by Aboriginal people and Elders that offers training for employment and helps at the grassroots level with emergency relief for struggling families.

Shane also operates a mentor program to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

Mona Vale Memorial Hall, 1606 Pittwater Rd, Mona Vale. Free Event (Donations welcome)



Monday April 8
7.30pm start

ASG-MWP Business Meeting – All ASG Members Welcome.

Mona Vale Memorial Hall, 1606 Pittwater Rd, Mona Vale.

Monday May 13
7.30pm start

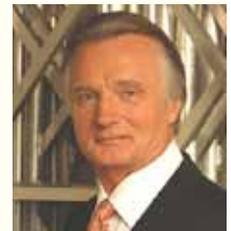
ASG-MWP Information Night – All Welcome.

What is really happening in the NT?

An update on the *NT Intervention* with Jeff McMullen and Graeme Mundine – an evening not to be missed.

Mona Vale Memorial Hall, 1606 Pittwater Rd, Mona Vale.

Free Event (Donations welcome)



Sunday May 26

SORRY DAY

Set this Day aside for a journey of healing to remember the *Stolen Generation*, the children and their families and the meaning and repercussions of this to all Australians today. More details in the next *Elimatta*

May 27 to July 14

GURINGAI FESTIVAL

Lots more about the Festival in the next *Elimatta*.

Monday June 10
7.30pm start

ASG-MWP Business Meeting – All ASG Members Welcome.

Mona Vale Memorial Hall, 1606 Pittwater Rd, Mona Vale.

Sunday July 7-14

NAIDOC Week 2013

This years theme is: *We value the vision: Yirrkalá Bark Petitions 1963*



ASG-MWP would like to thank Dee Why RSL, Pittwater RSL, Forestville RSL and Pittwater Council for their continued support in 2013



An Invitation to join us

**Aboriginal Support Group
Manly Warringah Pittwater**

Founded 1979

Membership is \$25 per year

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P.O. Box 129 NARRABEEN NSW 2101

www.asgmwp.net

Elimatta is the newsletter of the Aboriginal Support Group Manly Warringah Pittwater.

Articles are welcome with the understanding that editorial changes may be made and that contributors agree that the material will be archived by the National Library of Australia.

Contributors to *Elimatta* are from many different cultures and backgrounds. Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Editors or members of the ASG.

Please email articles where possible to the_elimatta@gmail.com

If you use any of the material it would be appreciated if the extract is set in context and the source acknowledged.



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