

# L. Turner Angale - a great loss for Alice Springs

**For a woman who was so physically tiny, Ms Turner spent much of her life struggling against forces that believed they were stronger than her. But they weren't, because eventually L Turner Angale won nearly every battle she took on.**

L Turner Angale bore witness to two of the great victories for the Arrernte people of Alice Springs and played her part in the triumphs

She was born in the 1920s and played a crucial role in preventing a dam being built over important sacred sites in the Todd River and as a witness in the Arrernte native title claim.

Ms Turner Angale lived a traditional life with her family in a humpy at Irlpme on Bond Springs north of Alice Springs, learning about her father's country, her culture and law.

Ms Turner's early life was in many ways like other Aboriginal people in the Alice Springs region at that time.

Her father worked on Bond Springs and the family, who lived in humpies made from bullock skins in a large camp, walked to town on weekends to pick up rations.

As a child she was hidden from Sargeant Stott by her mother and remembers many children being taken away.

After marrying as a young girl, she moved around with her husband for station work.

She cared for the sheep and nanny goats on the Garden Station and they lived at Santa Teresa, Altunga, and Charles Creek as well as Irlpme.

Ms Turner's life was typical of the dispossession suffered by Arrernte people. However, she took her role as caretaker for her traditional country very seriously and fought hard against one of the most shameful acts by the Northern Territory Government in local history.

In 1983, former Northern Territory Chief Minister Paul Everingham announced the construction of a recreation dam near the Alice Springs Telegraph Station.

The lake would destroy and

desecrate a number of sacred sites, including Werlatye Atherre, an important part of the Two-Women Dreaming, which extends north and south of Alice Springs, connecting different language groups throughout Central Australia.

Traditional landowners had consistently told the Northern Territory Government that Werlatye Atherre, which was registered under the Northern Territory Government Sacred Sites Act, could not be destroyed, but Everingham was determined to proceed.

A few weeks after the announcement, the traditional landowners established a protest camp near the Alice Springs Telegraph Station.

The traditional landowners maintained the protest camp for six months until a fire caused two tragic deaths and the protesters had to leave the camp area in accordance with Aboriginal tradition.

The Commonwealth Government intervened and halted the work temporarily while it inquired into the issue.

It found that the significance of Werlatye Atherre made the area unsuitable for any recreation lake.

The Northern Territory Government reluctantly dropped the proposal, but in 1988 a large flood claimed the lives of three Aboriginal river-campers.

The new Chief Minister Steve Hatton blamed the traditional owners of Werlatye Atherre for the deaths and the Northern Territory Government renewed its push.

This time Junction Waterhole slightly further north was chosen and early in January 1990, AAPA issued a certificate under the Aboriginal Sacred Sites Protection Act authorising a dam to be built at Junction Waterhole.

The traditional landowners were horrified: many had not been consulted at all and others had only been given half the story.

The Central Land Council fought hard and commissioned engineers to look at the proposal but the Northern Territory Government dismissed all objections and gave approval for the dam to proceed.

There were a number of temporary halts to the work and AAPA withdrew its certificate, but work continued until 1992 when the then Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Robert Tickner issued a declaration under s.10 of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act to protect the sacred sites around Junction Waterhole for a period of twenty years, effectively preventing the construction of the proposed dam.

It was only the second s.10 declaration ever made and was a major victory for the Arrernte traditional landowners who had fought for so long.

Ms Turner Angale was an important contributor to that victory.

Ms Turner Angale then went on to become a witness in the long struggle by the Arrernte to have native title recognised over the town of Alice Springs.

The application was lodged in 1994, and despite the preparedness of the former CLP Government to publicly acknowledge Arrernte people as the traditional owners of Alice Springs, a mutually agreeable settlement could not be negotiated despite the best efforts of the native title holders and the CLC.

It meant that the claim would have to be contested in the Federal Court.

L Turner Angale was one of those claimants whose evidence was heard

in the long hearings which would follow where, as a member of one of the three estate groups involved she talked about her connection to her country.

In May 2000, six years and many thousands of dollars later, the Federal Court handed down a major decision formally recognising that Arrernte native title holders continue to retain their rights as traditional owners and decision makers for most of the reserve, park and vacant crown land in Alice Springs.

This decision was the first in Australia to recognise native title in an urban area.

For the Arrernte, almost 130 years after European settlement began in the Centre, the common law of Australia had finally recognised their native title rights and interests as the owners of the Alice Springs area for thousands of years.

The Federal Court decision bears testament to the determination of Arrernte people to maintain their traditional connection to country against overwhelming odds, and it also demonstrates the resilience and strength of Arrernte culture that provides the foundation for so much of the community life of Alice Springs and Central Australia.

Ms Turner Angale lived the early years of her life in a humpy, another Arrernte dispossessed of her land, she had to hide to escape becoming part of the Stolen Generations, she fought to protect her father's country from an indiscriminate dam and finally won native title over her land.

For a woman who was so short on stature, Ms Turner Angale spent much of her life struggling against forces that believed they were stronger than her, but history has already proved them wrong.

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The 80-year whole-of-community lease option would also pay rent to the traditional owners.

The rent for the first 15 years of the lease would be two million dollars and would be paid up front.

Under the 80-year whole-of-community lease option, traditional owners and Yuendumu community members would give

up control of their whole community to the Commonwealth office holder for the 80-year leasing period.

However, while traditional owners would not have decision making power over development or other decisions, they would still be able to give advice to the Commonwealth officer through a consultative forum.

The traditional owners would also relinquish any effective control via the permits system.

"The two million dollars is a bribe. It's our own money from the mines," Mathew Egan said. "It's not the Federal Government's."

"We've got to stand up for our rights," Jeanie Egan said. "They want to take

this town. We've got to stand up for our rights."

Jimmy Langdon added: "We're supposed to look after the land, but there are changes that destroy the land. If you say yes, you will have no rights."

"We can say so many things, we can be angry about so many things, but at the end they do

anything."

Anger at the meeting was also directed at the Labor Party for not providing stronger representation for Aboriginal people.

"What about our Labor politicians?" Dennis Williams said. "We put them in power and they don't even care. I think we should make some kind of indigenous party."