

20 YEARS AFTER THE LANDMARK BARUNGA STATEMENT

Hundreds turned out recently to celebrate a special milestone for the ever-popular Barunga Festival – the 20th anniversary of the Barunga Statement.

Barunga, east of Katherine, is the scene of an annual cultural and sporting gathering of the region's Aboriginal people, hosted by local traditional owners, the Jawoyn.

It is also the site of the presentation of the Barunga Statement by traditional owners to then Prime Minister Bob Hawke in 1988, Australia's bicentennial year.

The Barunga Statement, which took its inspiration from the Yirrkala bark petition in 1963, called for Aboriginal self-management, a national system of land rights, compensation for loss of lands, respect for Aboriginal identity, an end to discrimination and the granting of full civil, economic, social and cultural rights.

Northern Land Council chairman Wali Wunungmurra, and one of the last surviving signatories to the Bark Petition, joined other Indigenous and Government leaders in speaking about the event of 20 years ago, and the lessons learned.

"The most important thing a government can do to assist Aboriginal people to overcome disadvantage, is to consult us and listen to us," Mr Wunungmurra said.

"To allow us to have our own representative bodies, so we can make decisions for ourselves – so we re-establish our independence."

Mr Wunungmurra acknowledged that the national apology to the stolen generations by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd 'is a first step in the right direction', but says that more needs to be done in consultation with Aboriginal people.

"I urge government to listen to

Traditional Owners when we talk about the plans we have for our communities and our land," he said.

"We all need to work together, Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people, to make sure that when the government gives, it does not take away at the same time.

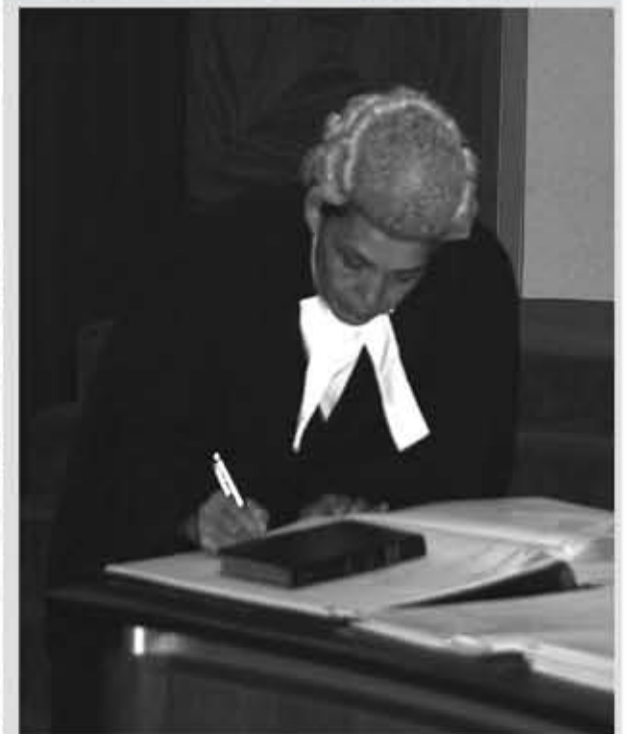
Mr Wunungmurra also spoke about the historic photographic exhibition, Land Is Life, which was display at the festival.

"It (the exhibition) tells the story of struggle to have our land rights recognised," he said.

"It is an epic tale of setbacks and celebrations."



Legal admission for NLC staffer



Trish Rigby-Christophersen

Northern Land Council Indigenous land management facilitator Trish Rigby-Christophersen took her first steps into the legal profession recently, with her official admission at the Northern Territory Supreme Court in Darwin. Trish completed her Graduate Diploma of Legal Practice while working full-time.

NLC members and staff congratulate her.

