

## **Larrakia religion**

### **Introduction**

On 17 May 2006 after hearing 68 days of evidence and submissions from Larrakia witnesses, experts and interested parties in the Federal Court (Mansfield 2006:Para 31-44), Mr Justice Mansfield determined that native title does not exist in relation to the claimed areas of land and waters that were the subject of the Darwin Part A Consolidated Proceeding. Appeals from Justice Mansfield's decision by the Quall Applicants and the Risk Applicants were unanimously dismissed by the Full Federal Court on 5 April 2007 (Risk v Northern Territory [2007] 240 ALR75). Mr Justice Mansfield (2006: Para 673) wrote in his final decision:

I was unable to draw from that evidence any indication of a normative society holding information about sites of spiritual significance in the Darwin area, including the claim area, and involving an appreciation of, and a responsibility for conveying the spiritual significance of those sites. Whilst there has clearly been some passage of knowledge from one generation to another, the evidence points to it having been at a personal level rather than in accordance with some normative system involving commonality of traditional laws and customs for the passing of such knowledge.

According to Ben Scambray (2007:152), the decision demonstrates 'the narrow focus of the [*Native Title Act, 1993*] in accounting for the impacts of the colonial process on Indigenous rights and interests, and its limited ability to recognise the dynamics of change that are encompassed by the term tradition'. However, although the Larrakia witnesses may have failed to satisfy the court that they belonged to a society with an uninterrupted system of laws and customs, the transcripts reveal the survival of individual beliefs in the spiritual power of sites and associated Dreaming stories.

### **'Tainted evidence'**

During the cross-examination of witnesses, the Northern Territory Government lawyers were able to establish that many witnesses learned what little they did know about Larrakia laws and customs from evidence heard during the Kenbi land claim (Toohey 2002:24). The inference is not new: In his essay 'Tainted evidence', Walsh (1995:103) describes how the Kenbi Land Claim book (Brandl et al 1979) was widely distributed and read by 'urban Larrakia ... embedded in a "culture of literacy"', with a full command of English. Walsh notes, 'During the [Kenbi] claim people in this category arrived with pen and paper, took notes and frequently referred to written material.' The anthropologist, Beth Povinelli (1993a:55) also claims: 'Laragiya are often charged with having gained knowledge on traditional matters from books...' and gives two examples of witnesses in the Kenbi land claim hearings

(Povinelli 1993a:56-57). As a result, Walsh (1995:109) asks ‘Can people who acquire “traditional knowledge” through “non traditional” means really be regarded as traditional Aborigines?’<sup>1</sup>

During an appeal against Mansfield’s decision the Northern Territory Government lawyer questioned Tibby Quall’s evidence by claiming that: (i) Mr Quall found out he was a member of the Danggalaba clan in 1989 during the first Kenbi Land Claim; (ii) Mr Justice Mansfield (2006: Para 713) had commented, ‘Tibby Quall acknowledged that he had done an “enormous” amount of reading and research on the Larrakia people’; (iii) Mr Quall only found out the Aboriginal name site, Darramanggamaning in the late 1980’s - his uncle simply referred to it as Two Fella Creek.

It is not the intention of this chapter to question Larrakia religious beliefs which have been proven with regard to one ‘descent group’ on Cox Peninsula in the Kenbi land claim (Gray 2000). Obviously, in the Darwin area since 1869 many significant sites have been destroyed and others alienated from Aboriginal customary use; however, many sites have belatedly been registered with the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority. However, from an ethnographic point of view, sites are not necessarily isolated pockets to be protected, but may belong to a system of beliefs and creation stories, as this chapter attempts to explain.

### **Aspects of ‘Dreamings’ sites**

Merlan (1991:345) suggests that beliefs associated with sites must be understood in ‘a history of domination and uncertainty’ whereby change within Aboriginal culture has been, and will continue to be, considerable. Povinelli (1993a:697) also claims that when Aboriginal people apply the Dreaming as an interpretive framework for contemporary social or political issues, especially land development, ‘government agencies and private industries with economic interests in the region often represent these applications as untraditional, there by attempting to undercut their political force’.

As Merlan (1991) has documented at Coronation Hill, beliefs are not static and respond to intrusion. They may lie dormant and be revived, albeit as a result of renewed interest in an area. In the past, Aboriginal beliefs were not considered in decisions about development. Renewed interest through land claims and recognition of Indigenous rights has led to institutional support for a position of opposition that was not able to be heard in past decades. Prestigious projects may also appear to confirm the importance of sites. In addition, unusual or catastrophic events such as Cyclone Tracy may be attributed to the disturbance of sites or neglect by whose duty it is to ‘look after’ these sites.

Peter Sutton (1998:110) points out that Dreaming sites are ‘focal points or focal areas, not bounded estates or blocks of land’. Determining who to consult is made more difficult because, ‘None of the

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1. Walsh (1995:122-3) suggests that through reliance on written records ‘some traditional knowledge will tend to become more “fixed” than it might have been in the past’, while in oral tradition stories were reshaped gradually over the generations.

remnant clans (including the Danggalaba clan), for example, identify a distinct sub-part of Larrakia land as their estate in the classical sense' (Sutton 1998:111). Furthermore, Mansfield (2006:Para 739) cited Bill Risk as saying 'full stories' of most of the Dreaming sites on the Darwin side of the harbour have been lost.

Povinelli (1993a:684) describes two kinds of Dreamings. There are Dreamings that are site bound 'or move on well-known tracks' that are relatively fixed, compared to Dreamings that are less predictable and 'tricky' because 'you cannot always know when or why they will appear'. She adds that 'birthing Dreamings' are even less grounded, in that one never knows beforehand where they will manifest themselves. Site Dreamings, or *durlg* in the Wadjigiyn language, are created by past actions of ancestral beings so are more fixed, whereas birthing Dreamings and other less predictable events are signs of 'mythic action in the present' (Povinelli 1993:687). According to Povinelli (1995; 1993:684) knowledge of these differences comes from 'continued ritual and economic interaction with the countryside'.

Povinelli (1991:239) gives the example of how the power of Dreaming places are interpreted when a fighter jet disappeared off the coast of Cox Peninsula. After this incident the women of Belyuen claimed, '[The aeroplane] disappear because of the Lizard Dreaming, you know, that frill lizard ... Maybe the government will try to blame us, but we warned then before, you cannot bomb those islands'. In that case, an unexplained event was interpreted through a pre-existing belief. Povinelli adds the interpretation 'demonstrates the tremendous power that Belyuen families [and Larrakia generally] claim to manage.'

Mansfield (2006) uses three headings for his discussion of Dreamings. The categories are 'Place Dreamings' (Para 602-604), 'Personal Dreamings' (Para 605-612), and 'Family Dreamings/Clan Dreamings/Totems' (Para 613-624). Brandl et al (1979:158) quote Elkin's description of 'Place Dreamings' as 'places sanctified by mythical events, where the spirits of "shades" of natural species and objects sojourn'.<sup>2</sup> These are places laid down by the travels of mythic beings during creation times.

Amongst the 'Personal Dreamings' are a person's *maroi*, which is the 'dreaming of the locality in which his (or her) conception totem or maroi ... is "found" by the father' (Elkin 1950:68; Brandl et al 1979: 159-163). Walsh (1989a:19) distinguishes between two types of connection to place. He writes:

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<sup>2</sup> Elkin wrote, the "dreamings" or *dorlks* [on Cox Peninsula] were brought or "made" by a cult hero, Waran [Waryn]. Brandl et al (1979: 71) add that Waran 'made' the 'dreamings' for the Wagaidj'. Gray (2000: 5.4.10) describes *Wariyn* (site 49) as: 'Possibly the most significant of the localised dreamings ... on the west coast of the Cox Peninsula. This site is associated with the dreaming of the same name, which is said to be a male supreme creator being ... Again there is controversy as to whether Larrakia or Wadjigiyn is the appropriate language in which to speak.

‘A person can obtain personal associations with particular dreamings either by inheritance (*durlg*) or by conception (*maruy*). For a fuller discussion see Brandl et al (1979:157-168).

Marjorie Bil Bil (1993:8-9) is a Marri Ammu woman and storyteller from Belyuen on the Cox Peninsula. Amongst her poems and stories in her book, ‘It just lies there from the beginning’ (Bil Bil 1993:8-9), is the poem, ‘The land it belongs to traditional Larrakiya people’. The final verse expresses the ongoing significance of Aboriginal ‘Dreaming’ sites:

What I heard from the older people was important  
For that land was the site of the dreaming  
And the younger people are still learning.  
The older people say the dreaming and the sites are very important to us all  
The site and the Dreaming should be protected very well.  
The elders say the Dreaming are dangerous,  
Some things might happen to us all.  
That’s why it is very important.

Similarly, Iyanuk, or Felix Holmes (deceased), expressed a common lament of those of his generation:

You got to work for country ...  
Learn ceremonies,  
Sing songs,  
Visit sites...  
No good to get a lot of money  
If you got no songs or ceremony,  
Then you just a rich man ...  
But you got no story.<sup>3</sup>

In summary, a ‘Dreaming’, or *durlg*, may not necessarily be a fixed feature of the landscape, but may wander over a distance on land or sea. It may be a story place or a place associated with the propagation of a particular species or a Dreaming place for one species alone (Brandl et al 1979:159). The term is also used for a powerful being or spirit. According to Brandl et al (1979:164) there are also ‘*durlg* groups’, such as the *danggalaba* clan, who hold a primary spiritual responsibility to the territory in which their *durlg*, or common spirit, is located, elsewhere described as their totem..

## **Kenbikenbi**

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<sup>3</sup> Felix Holmes was the last senior man of the Limilngan tribe and carried the Larrakia law (Davis 1994:35; Walsh 1981:3, 11; Brandl et al 1979:40). Genealogies in the Kenbi Land Claim Book (p.26) show that Holmes was a brother-in-law to Crab Billy Belyuen of the Larrakia Danggalaba clan Felix was filmed singing in language to didgeridoo played by Prince of Wales in the video, ‘Bunji Book launch’ (Day 1994b).

In the Kenbi Land Claim book, the anthropologists describe an underground path linking the two sides of the harbour, after which the Kenbi claim was named:

[The crocodile *durlg* located in Ivel Creek] is also called kenbikenbi, after which this land claim is named. Kenbi also means ‘didgeridu’ and bamboo’, and is the underground tunnel linking the islands to the west of the claim area with Indian Island and the Cox Peninsula. From Belyuen it crosses to Kalalak in the Darwin area, where the traditional owners, the Secretary family now live (Brandl et al 1979:165).

Gray (2000: Para 5.4.4) adds: The Kenbi dreaming is also connected with *Kalalak* (site 110) and *Nanggalinya* (site 111). The former is within the urban area of Darwin, in or near a community in which a number of Aboriginal people, including some of the Larrakia group claimants, live.’ In the next paragraph Gray (2000:Para 5.4.5) notes ‘a strong belief that the *Kenbi* dreaming connects the various sources of freshwater, so that the water which comes from the springs [eg *Kalalak*] to which I have referred is the same water as that which lies in the *Belyuen* (site 95) waterhole’<sup>4</sup>.

### **Larrakia or Wadjigiyn?**

Povinelli (1993:699) describes *durlg* as the Wadjigiyn term for a Dreaming site ‘because Cox Peninsula sites are named in the Wadjigiyn language or have been phonologically adapted to Wadjigiyn’ (see also Walsh 1989c). Alternatively, the Larrakia word *dirila* is the equivalent of the Wadjigiyn *durlg* (Brandl et al 1979:160). Mansfield (2006: Para 787) notes that Tibby Quall gave evidence that the name for the creator being site, Wariyn, is a Wadjigiyn word, rather than a Larrakia word.

John Avery (1997:152-3) also gives examples of substitution of Wadjigiyn for Larrakia words, referring to an essay by Michael Walsh titled, ‘The “Wadjigiynisation” of the Cox Peninsula and the Islands.’ Avery (1997:153) points out that the use of Wadjigiyn names for places on the Cox Peninsula and the Islands is part of the way that the Wadjigiyn and other immigrant groups have made the Cox Peninsula and the Islands their home. This has largely occurred by ‘synonym substitution’ that has preserved the original meaning. One index of change is that unlike the Wadjigiyn, the Larrakia belonged to a non-circumcising cultural bloc extending from western Arnhem Land to the Cox Peninsula. In addition, there is evidence that Larrakia had ceremonies different to those of Wadjigiyn and other language groups that have replaced or intermarried with the Larrakia on the Cox Peninsula. Avery (1997:154) states ‘given that ceremony has been imported to the Cox Peninsula this is not something that the Wadjigiyn could hold in custody for Larrakia.’ Although the Wadjigiyn hold

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<sup>4</sup> Walsh (1989a:10) mentions ‘a water snake dreaming’ at Kalalak that was damaged by road works in 1983. In Aboriginal Australia, springs are often said to be created by the Rainbow Serpent in various manifestations.

custody for the Cox Peninsula for the Larrakia, Avery emphasises: ‘The Wadjigiyn do not follow a distinctly Larrakia way of life’.

Although ‘rites of passage’ ceremonies like initiation and mortuary rites, or *kapuk*, may be held at particular places the ceremonies not primarily oriented to celebrating the powers of particular sites (see McConvell and McConvell 1989; AAPA 1996).<sup>5</sup> However to conduct these ceremonies in an urban area, suitable land needs to be set aside. In past decades, ceremonies have been held on Aboriginal leases at Knuckeys Lagoon and Kulaluk, but these leases and other bushland sites are becoming increasingly alienated by development.<sup>6</sup> An example is the attempt to rezone a *Kunapipi* ceremony site documented by James Gaykamangu on the Kulaluk lease.<sup>7</sup>

### **Dreaming tracks**

The distinctiveness of Larrakia religion is a point often made by Tibby Quall, who maintains that the Larrakia Dreaming tracks are unlike the dreaming tracks on maps in the Kenbi Land Claim. Quall emphasises that the Dreaming tracks should go from Two Fella Creek on the western side of the harbour, track around the Darwin harbour, and from there into western Arnhem Land. Quall contrasts his version of the dreaming track with that in the Kenbi Land Claim book where the main Dreaming track travels from Cox Peninsula, across the harbour directly to Gundal on Emery Point and Old Man Rock at Casuarina. From there, the Kenbi researchers say the dreaming track travels to Shoal Bay and ‘eastward to East Alligator’ (Brandl et al 1979:68 & 70; Walsh 1981:4).

Giving a more detailed version of the Danggalaba Dreaming track, Tibby Quall states:

Instead of following our Dreaming track, the NLC made the Danggalaba Dreaming track go straight across the harbour. Their version of the Danggalaba Dreaming tracks only goes from Kenbi across to Kulaluk. The Northern Land Council (NLC) Danggalaba Dreaming track didn’t take in Talc Head or King Table. It belonged to the Wadjigiyn-Kiyuk people and was not a Larrakia Dreaming track.

The Danggalaba Dreaming track goes to Talc Head, Kings Table, Berry Springs, Elizabeth River, the East Arm rock formation, a registered site below Kormilda College, then to Old Man Rock No.2, Sandy Island (Yirra), Lameroo Beach, Doctors Gully, Emery Point (Gundal), a site at the bottom of the cliff at Emery Point, Cullen Bay, Mindil, the Kurrajong Crescent banyan tree, Casuarina Beach, Old Man Rock No. 1 (Dariba Nungalinya), the corner of Lee Point (Binbinya), Mekkits Creek, Shoal Bay. Gunn Point, Malawi (Humpty Doo), White Stone, a

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<sup>5</sup> Marrett et al (2001) describe *kapuk* as a ceremony to remove the spirit of a deceased person from human society by burning belongings in which the ghost resides’. See also Tennant (1983).

<sup>6</sup>See ‘Smoking ceremony at Fish Camp’ and ‘Aboriginal flag raising ceremony’ (Youtube videos).

<sup>7</sup> See Gaykamangu and Day (2010). According to James Gaykamangu, Larrakia elders concerned about loss of land sent message sticks to Arnhem Land groups and elsewhere, calling them to come to Darwin for a combined *Kunapipi* ceremony on land behind the old Bagot Reserve that is now part of the Kulaluk lease.

ceremony ground at Koolpinya (Guldinyah), then to Limillimill and keeps going to Mary River. The Dreaming track joins the Wulna red ochre track called Tjetjering (willy wagtail) and then to Kakadu.

Our Dreaming track connects these sites but the recording of our Dreaming track was never done. Our dreaming track goes east, you can follow the stone circles that are used for ceremonies. At Vernon Islands (Manabar) there is the Two Sisters dreaming – all part of our country.<sup>8</sup>

Neither Mansfield (2006) or the federal court that hear the appeal against his findings found the above purported knowledge of Dreaming tracks to be convincing.

### **Yirra and other dreaming sites**

The Larrakia Development Corporation newsletter (LNAC 2003) describes the travels of ‘a large dreaming Kangaroo’ over country in the Middle Arm, Wickham Point, and East Arm area. The newsletter states that ‘a crucial and important part of this kangaroo’s travels is Yirra Island, lying in East Arm, [approximately 2.4 kilometres north-west of Blaydin Point] and potentially harmful to people if they approach it incorrectly’. During the native title case, Bill Risk also described Yirra island as being associated with Kangaroo Dreaming (Mansfield 2006: Para 790). According to Mansfield, Yirra is a small island near the East Arm boat ramp recorded on the Site Register as of mythological significance. It is also called Catalina Island.

The environmental impact study by INPEX Browse (2009:127) also mention ‘Yirra’ and repeats the story of the creator Kangaroo (pp.127-128) as recorded by Dames and Moore (1998). According to this story, the area of water around the island is believed to be dangerous; ‘people approaching should do so in a certain way...’ (INPEX Browse 2009:128). The story extends to sand bars extending from the island which are said to represent the tail of the kangaroo (see Danes and Moore 1997).

There is also a well-documented frog dreaming on Cox Peninsula which Topsy Secretary told the anthropologists is linked with Dariba Nunggalinya at Casuarina (Brandl et al 1979:196); however, Mansfield (2006: Para 376-380) discusses conflicting witness statements regarding the frog dreaming at Casuarina<sup>9</sup>. In a lengthy discussion of the frog dreaming, Graham (1997:22) refers to a song with the nickname ‘*brak-brak*’ and ‘said to be a *wangga*’. Marrett al (2001) describe *wangga* as ‘songs normally received in a dream by songmen, or *medjakkarr* in Batjamalh, the language of the Wadjiginy people... [The singing of] *wangga* facilitates the opening of channels between humans and other orders of beings.’

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<sup>8</sup> Statement by Tibby Quall to Bill Day, Nightcliff, NT, 12 September, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> *Dariba* means Elder or Old Man in Larrakia language.

Bauman (2006:129) names the Frog Dreaming site as 'Ngartba-ngartba' and comments: 'Other significant sites in Larrakia country are associated with Ngartba-Ngartba frogs, including sites across the harbour on the Cox Peninsula.' Graham (1997:23) cites evidence given by Larrakia woman, Sue Roman: 'That same frog dreaming there at Wutut, Wutut [on Cox Peninsula], was told to me by my mother and Aunty Maudie and Olga and quite a few people ... every time we go camping there, how it was a dreaming from my grandmother, yes. And it sort of like comes right across to Yirra (island).'<sup>10</sup>

Mansfield (2006: Para 751) also heard evidence of a Bailer Shell Dreaming near Wickham Point. Mansfield was dismissive about the connection to a Cox Peninsula Dreaming of the same name:

There was some evidence of a Bailer Shell Dreaming near Wickham Point. Keith Risk, who principally spoke about it, was quite uncertain as to its origins and as to its details. He accepted that he may have assumed the existence of the dreaming himself, as he did not remember having learned of it. Tibby Quall described it in a little detail, but was the only person to do so. Raylene Singh, during the Kenbi Claim hearing, referred to the same dreaming track as Mr Quall (Ngayin. Gilmak) but did not say that it extended to the Darwin side of Darwin Harbour.

Mansfield (2006: Para 764) also notes that several witnesses referred to a Mermaid Dreaming at the sandbar off Cullen Bay, although there was no detail of it. He added that Susan Roman in the Kenbi Claim hearing said that the Mermaid Dreaming does not exist any more, following the development of Cullen Bay. Topsy Secretary made a similar observation to Sean Heffernan (1996:14-15). She told Heffernan, 'there used to be a mermaid that use [sic] to swim and play in the ocean close to Cullen Beach but that it was no longer able to do this due to the changes to country there'. Topsy said, 'I don't think it'll be back because the house is still going on and on and on, noise. See, in those day wasn't a noise.'

Although Mr Justice Mansfield was unconvinced by Larrakia evidence of Dreaming sites in the Darwin Harbour, in 1998 Douglas Williamson in the Federal Court recognised Larrakia rights at Wickham Point, based upon a report dated 4 April 1997 entitled, 'Larrakia Native Title Rights and Interests in Wickham Point and Channel Island' by Ken Lum, an anthropologist employed by the Northern Land Council.<sup>11</sup> The report concludes that the Larrakia people may still hold native title interests in the subject area, although this conclusion was disputed by the NT Government. In this case, it appears that Williamson was referring to hunting and gathering activities, because he noted, 'There are no registered Sacred Sites within the acquisition area.'

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<sup>10</sup> Graham (1997:23); Aboriginal Land Commission, 26 October, 1995, p.3972, 25-40.

<sup>11</sup> The writer has not had access to the Lum report.

Williamson (1998) admits: 'It is not the function of the Tribunal in the present proceedings to determine in any definitive fashion the existence, nature and scope of the existing native title rights and interests made prior to any formal determination of native title'. However, after hearing the evidence Williamson (1998) comes to a different conclusion to Mansfield regarding Larrakia connection to the area:

Dr Peter Sutton, linguist and anthropologist, gave evidence and expressed his support for the conclusion in the Lum report. In an affidavit affirmed 29 December 1997, Dr Sutton states that in his opinion there is a sound basis for the assertion that the Larrakia people are the holders (subject to any questions of extinguishment) of core and contingent rights and interests in the Wickham Point area.

Mansfield (2006: Para 785) discusses Tibby Quall's evidence of 'a travelling women dreaming track, which is part of the creation of Aboriginal law and ceremonies'. Although Tibby described a number of sites around the greater Darwin area which he said were located on the track that were related to red ochre, called *damajingwa*, the Northern Territory Government submitted 'the nature and content of the story which he described was expanded upon in an exhibit recording information provided by Felix Holmes.'

### **East-west connection**

Felix Holmes, a Limilngan man, told Walsh (1981:7) that to the east of Darwin there were two Larrakia ceremonial sites: Bilurrigwa on Shoal Bay and Mayilmilma near Blankey's Jungle where people from all groups in the area participated. So strong are the connections to the east that Holmes claimed to the Kenbi researchers:

'If you had put a tape [recorder] on the ceremony ground at Oenpelli and you had taken another tape at Daramanggamaning [Two Fella Creek] (a ceremonial site on the north coast of the Cox Peninsula), it would have been the same.' Holmes also stated that the ceremonies shifted to Darwin, presumably meaning Gundal, and then to Daramanggamaning after the site became unsuitable through the presence of the army barracks.

Felix Holmes told the Aboriginal Land Commissioner (see Brandl et al 1979:182): 'Daramanamandji came from Oenpelli, to the Kulida ground, on to Lalikili, Bilyingki jungle, Shoal Bay, Larrakia barracks, and Daramanamandji (Daramangkamaning) at Delissaville [Belyuen]. He finished at Twofella Creek...' That is, from the east to the west. However, Graham comments: 'The path from west to east, as per the Kenbi book [Brandl et al 1979] I would suggest is an essentially western view, the east to west, a western Arnhem Land view.'

The Tiwi, Wagaidj, Larrakia, Maung and Gunwinggu have a myth concerning the Rainbow moving from west to the east. In the Wagaidj, Larrakia, Tiwi and Gunwinggu cases it is often accompanied by a Whale, described by Brandl et al (1979:69) as ‘a large sea creature, sometimes translated as sea monster or whale. The travels of this Dreaming being, or *Durlg*, are described as:

[F]rom as far south as Badjalarr (or Peron Island as non Aborigines call it) stopping at places such as Djirrbul (on Finnis River) and many other named localities which have no European name before reaching the island chain in the claim area and then via the island chain to Daramanggamaning [Two Fella Creek] on the north coast of the Cox Peninsula and across the harbour to Old Man Rock off Casuarina Beach and beyond at least as far east as Shoal Bay.

Confirming a connection, in 1975 The Arnhem Land leader, Silas Roberts, stated publicly that the Larrakia were not the only ones with an interest in Old Man Rock. He was quoted as saying, ‘Mr Joshua says the Daribah Nunggalinya [Old Man Rock] is also a dreaming place for the Oenpelli people’ (Bunji, 1975). The Kenbi Claim Book adds that Silas Roberts’s statement is ‘undoubtedly a reference to *Lumaluma*, the Whale’ which is said to have instituted sacred ritual, ‘just as he did in the claim area’ (Brandl et al 1979:71).<sup>12</sup>

### **Old Man Rock**

Mansfield (2006: Para 760) confirms that the evidence suggests that Old Man Rock is part of the Kenbi Dreaming track from Belyuen to particular areas around the Darwin Peninsula. He noted: ‘Morris Fejo described the story at some length, and said that there are dances and ceremonies that are done for Old Man Rock, but he does not know what they are called and does not know them.’

Although no witnesses were familiar with the rituals associated with the site, Mansfield agreed that Dariba Nunggalinya (Old Man Rock) is ‘clearly an important Larrakia site, if not the most important Larrakia site.’ As a surviving indicator of the power of the Larrakia Dreaming, the stories about Dariba Nunggalinya are worth relating in more detail. The beliefs also illustrate how unusual events can be attributed to the Dreaming, and confirm the dangers of disturbing the powers that the sites represent (see Bauman 2006:128).

Mansfield (2006: Para 424) cites an earlier submission by the late Bobby Secretary:

In 1975 Bobby Secretary made a submission to Interim Commissioner Ward which stated ‘Dariba Noongalinya, he is the dreaming place long long time ago may be a thousand years. Travelling around the country, came to here and turned to rock. If the white man put

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<sup>12</sup> Brandl et al (1979:71) note: ‘Details of this are still secret-sacred and will not be reproduced here.’

something there, something bad happen to this place Darwin ... We want this place, nobody can touch it. ... It is our job to look after it ... Daribah Noongalinya belongs to Larrakia.<sup>13</sup>

Ken White writes in, 'Old Man Rock and a Buddhist legend' (White 2002:176-178):

Old Man Rock is located off the Casuarina Coastal Reserve and is believed to be the final resting place of the first Larrakeyah man. According to the Larrakeyah people, Nunggalinya is responsible for earthquakes, storms and cyclones, including, of course, Cyclone Tracy. Such events, they believe, do not occur simply because of natural forces; they are provoked by human actions or failures. The legend of Old Man Rock was recounted by Andrew Henda, who lived at Bagot Reserve in Darwin, during the hearing of the Interim Aboriginal Land Commission on the Larrakeyah and associated Aboriginals' claim for the rock. And Andrew didn't mince his words.

Andrew Henda is quoted as saying, in part that Old Man Rock started off somewhere near Koolpinya and he started to travel 'until he where he sits down now'. When he was travelling he made a creek, 'the one out Koolpinya way, Black Jungle. When he sat down the tide came up and covered him'. Andrew said that his father told him the story and also told him, 'that rock [is] part of the Larrakeyah dreaming' (White 2002:178).

The Queensland Aboriginal activist, Cheryl Buchanan, claims that Bobby Secretary, told 'quite a few people' in Melbourne in September 1974 that 'the spirit who watched over their land, had said that a very big cyclone was to come [to Darwin]' (Marginson 1975:8). Bobby's sister Topsy Secretary also told Heffernan (1996) that 'one important reason for Cyclone Tracy coming to Darwin in 1974 was because her brother [Bobby Secretary] asked [Old Man Rock] to bring a big wind because the Government would not give the *Larrikiya* the Kulaluk land' (See also 'The revenge of Old Man Rock', *NT News* April 30, 1994; *NT News* July 11, 1975; *Bunji* March 1982).

In an interview with Topsy Secretary, Heffernan transcribes Topsy's explanation for Cyclone Tracy which destroyed Darwin in December 1974. Partly in Larrakia language, she told Heffernan: 'My brother went over there and they talked to him. Well *Gunyaw Borda-an-gwa!* That mean 'you kill Darwin!' Lucky the sea was long way. *Gweyla gulu nganyuk gweyla gulagwa* mean 'he'll have to kill Darwin!' And he did, cyclone Tracy (Secretary and Heffernan 1996:12)

Keith Cole (1977:183-4) also refers to Larrakia beliefs in the power of Old Man Rock:

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<sup>13</sup> In 1982 the Aboriginal Sacred Sites Authority approved the registration of Old Man Rock as a sacred site. Access is now restricted without the permission of the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority.

Very seriously, the Larrakeyah said that we at Nungalinga College were responsible for the cyclone. They thought that we had gone out to ‘Old Man Rock’ and taken from it the sixteen-ton granite boulder which stands as our symbol in front of our College. Apparently old Nungalinga was so enraged by this act of desecration that he sent the cyclone.<sup>14</sup>

Mansfield (2006:Para 421-2) notes that the Larrakia people lodged a land claim over Dariba Nungalinga, known as ‘Old Man Rock’ around the same time as the Kulaluk and Gundal land claims were lodged. He then cites historical references to Old Man Rock (Paragraphs 421-426):

Previously, in 1931 the Northern Territory Times had reported on an earth tremor in Darwin, recording that a ‘Larrakeeyah native’ insisted that the tremor occurred ‘because a certain King God turned over in his sleep. According to this informant there is a large stone or rock situated close to Casuarina Beach and reached by the tides at certain times. This rock is or was the First Aboriginal and the maker or beginner of the aboriginals of Australia. This king god sleeps near Casuarina Beach and occasionally when disturbed turns over in his sleep causing the whole earth to shake with his movements.’ *The Adelaide Advertiser* had published a similar article in 1931 referring to ‘a large stone close to the sea’ at Casuarina, believed to be ‘the King God, the first aborigine and creator of all others’.

### **Quail Island (Duwun)**

Protests over the bombing of a sacred site on Quail Island, or Duwun, illustrate the offence over many years felt by Aboriginal custodians, in this case the Wadjigiyn people of Cox Peninsula. In 1964 Keith Willey wrote: ‘For years the Waugaits, a “saltwater” tribe who live on the coast between Darwin and the mouth of the Daly, had muttered about the use of Quail Island by the RAAF as a bombing range.’ (Willey 1964:167; see also Day 2009b).

Ward McNally (1974:53-56) reports on a protest by four Aboriginal men: ‘...in mid-November four members of the Wagait tribe went to Quail Island, a hip of land about forty miles down the coastline and to the left of Darwin, and took up residence in an effort to stop the bombing of sacred tribal land by Australian and British air force planes’ (see Day 1994:94). Under the headline, ‘Island squatters defy RAF bombers’ the *Northern Territory News* reported:

The battle lines have been drawn on Quail Island ... ‘We want to make a protest,’ their leader, Roy Mudpool explained ... We don’t want any more bombing here. We hope that the protest

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<sup>14</sup> The rock in question is a large oval shaped boulder. Topsy Secretary came to me very distressed. She thought the rock had come from *Dariba Nungalinga* when in fact the rock was from Mount Bundy mine. I was instrumental in the college being named after Old Man Rock as Canon Butler wrote to me asking what would be a good Larrakia name for the college. The Larrakia people at Kulaluk suggested Nungalinga (see Cole 1977:184).

might do something. Of course the air force might not take any notice of us. We will just have to wait and see' (*NT News*, November 13 and 14, 1973).

In fact, the air force delayed the bombing until the four men had left the island – meanwhile the protestors had successfully publicised the issue nationally and caused Senators to ask questions in Canberra.

### **Emery Point**

Apart from Old Man Rock, the best documented site in the Darwin area is the Larrakia initiation ground at Emery Point, known as Gundal (see Mansfield 2006: Para 404-420).<sup>15</sup> After extensive hearings by the Interim Aboriginal Land Commissioner in 1975, it was recommended that this site be returned to the Larrakia people (Ward 1975b; Day 1994). Eventually, the site was registered by the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority.<sup>16</sup>

Walsh (1981:3) locates the Gundal site on a dreaming track linking many other sites along the coast of Cox Peninsula and south to at least the Peron Islands and east to [Shoal] Bay and beyond. Walsh (1981) continues:

The dreaming is for a creature called Nanggilmak described by George Munggalu who has it as one of his dreamings as a man with no mother and father, short and nuggetty with bony legs curved 'like a boomerang'. He is regarded as dangerous and to be wary of especially at night. Apart from being on this dreaming track Gundal has special significance as a ceremony site.

In the Kenbi claim, Mr Justice Gray (2000:5.4.31) referred to the link between sites in the Darwin area and well-documented Dreaming tracks on the Cox Peninsula. He wrote:

There are few sites outside the [Kenbi] land claimed which are said to relate to it. I have mentioned *Nanggalinya* (site 111) and *Kalalak* (site 110) as being associated with the *Kenbi* dreaming track (see para. 5.4.4). The only other site which needs to be mentioned on the Darwin side of Darwin Harbour is *Gundal* (site 109), at the point near Cullen Bay, within the area occupied by the Commonwealth of Australia as the Larrakeyah Barracks. Information relating to this site is secret to men; even its name is regarded by some as secret and should not be spoken in public.

Gray describes many important sites along the Cox Peninsula side of the harbour (Gray 2000:99-106), including further information on the Two Fella Creek site (Daramanggamanin), which Tibby Quall

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<sup>15</sup> In more recent times, the name of this secret-sacred site is not spoken by some Larrakia women.

<sup>16</sup> In 2011 the Australian Army agreed to decommission an open-air chapel on the point, removing the heavy stone altar, and allowing access by approved Larrakia men.

claims is the key Larrakia dreaming site linked to west Arnhem Land. Gray (2000: Para 5.4.15) repeats the information that this initiation site is linked by a Dreaming track with sites to the east, as far as Wulna country and Western Arnhem Land, but adds ‘it is not completely clear with what, if any, other sites on the land claimed it is connected ... No detailed evidence was given about it.’ However, he notes ‘the dreaming for this track is secret to men’. Gray continues (5.4.15):

In a report for the Aboriginal Sacred Sites Protection Authority (as the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority was then called), dated May 1981, Dr Walsh gave the name *Nanggilmak* to this dreaming. He described it as a dangerous being, associated with *Nanggalinya* (site 111), *Gundal* (site 109), *Nguranyini* (site 77), *Daliribarrk* (site 75), *Mindimindi* (site 70), *Belurriya* (site 68), *Debilipu* (site 66), *Waramanawagaidj* (site 65), *Idjibalaidj* (site 62), *Bangiyili* (site 61), *Milik* (site 52), *Gamarrnggamarrng* (site 44), *Buwambi* (site 42), *Igibidjit* (site 14) and *Duwun* (site 12). His description extended the dreaming track to the east of *Nanggalinya* (site 111), towards Arnhem Land, and to the south and south-west from *Duwun* (site 12), through a series of coastal sites to the Perron Islands.<sup>17</sup>

### **Other Dreaming sites**

In addition, Mansfield heard evidence about a site called Laniyuk at Berry Springs (Para 774) and the Mosquito Dreaming at Leanyer Swamp (Para 782). Walsh (1989:12) refers to the Leanyer site as a rock of special significance to the Larrakia, known as Sunrise Rock, ‘associated with a Mosquito Dreaming’. He notes that in mid-1985 Kathleen and Topsy Secretary were instrumental in having this site registered with AAPA. Mansfield (2006:Para 762) also says a number of witnesses referred to a ‘little Old Man Rock’ in the East Arm area near the mouth of the Adelaide River. However, the judge comments, ‘The evidence as to its location was rather vague.’<sup>18</sup>

Walsh (1989:13) expresses a Larrakia interest in the Palmerston area with a connection to Kakadu: ‘Another encroachment on Larrakia land is the development of Palmerston. Marlowes Lagoon has been identified as a sensitive area. The Palmerston area generally is activated by the travels of a Larrakia man from Kakadu country. Darwin Larrakia are dismayed that the land is being cut by roads and that the character of the area is being altered by the build-up of the satellite town.’

In addition, there was ‘quite a lot of evidence about One Mile Dam’ (Mansfield 2006:Para 784). The site is registered as belonging to the ‘Barramundi dreaming’ but the residents are not aware of any story associated with it. They claim the site is a spring further up the gully, and not the site that has

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<sup>17</sup> Presumably all but two of these sites are on the Cox Peninsula and islands. Walsh (1989a:18) states: ‘The travels of the principal mythological being, Ngayin.gilmak [sic] connect major sites in the Darwin area (Nanggalinya Site 41 and Gundal Site 40, qv Ngayin.gilmak track on site map) with the Cox Peninsula, Belyuen (Site 42) and the islands to the west.’

<sup>18</sup> Tibby Quall refers to this site as ‘Old Man Rock No. 2’ (Statement by Tibby Quall to Bill Day, Nightcliff, NT, 12 September, 2010).

been registered around the artificial dam. Mansfield only comments ‘some witnesses knew it as a place where there is white clay that can be used as a love potion or that the white clay may be used also as a good luck charm’ (ibid).

As Felix Holmes laments, in Aboriginal beliefs significant sites require rituals to be activated or placated. The land claim process also revealed many examples of rituals associated with sites in Larrakia country, such as when passing *Wariyn* by boat, Larrakia people regard it as proper to make an offering to the site by throwing a small amount of food or tobacco into the sea close to the rock (Gray 2000). Mansfield (2006:Para 633) also mentions ‘calling out’ when approaching sites. Johnny Singh emphasised that people passing the rock ‘should talk proper Larrakia’ and tells of a family in a canoe who did not do this ‘so Wariyn came out and drowned them’ (Walsh 1989a:19). Raylene Singh also said that her grandmother ‘has to speak Larrakia to [Wariyn] because it is a Larrakia dreaming’ (ibid).

Regarding ceremony as ‘encompassing large group gatherings and initiation rites’, Mansfield (2006: Para 652) found: ‘It is clear from the primary evidence that there are no longer any ceremonies (in the sense of that word as explained above) which take place on the Darwin side of the harbour, including in the claim area (Para 664). As mentioned, mortuary rituals take place on quite a large scale but these are not associated with particular places. Walsh (1989a:21) mentions *Nitjkurrum* maturation ritual at Belyuen that are similar to Larrakia *maniugu* ceremony (see Coombs et al 1983:379-382). The writer of this report was asked to leave the Kulaluk community because one such ‘young girl’ ceremony was about to take place where men are forbidden.

### **Conclusion**

Further observations by Williamson (1998) in the federal court are relevant principles for developers to consider. In his findings he commented:

Larrakia has submitted that it is relevant to consider sites outside the acquisition area, if they are likely to be affected. Such consideration is authorized by the criteria in s39(1)(f), if not otherwise. I do consider it relevant to have regard to nearby sites that may be adversely affected, either by developments on the surface of the land, or under the sea where shipping channels and pipelines may be developed.

Mr Risk refers in his affidavit to several sites in and around Darwin Harbour that he says may be affected. This is disputed by the Government party, which contends that no evidence exists to indicate that any registered site near the acquisition area will be adversely affected, and that this matter has been fully assessed in the Environmental Impact Statement prepared for the grantee party.

Larrakia submissions refer to the incremental effect of successive dispossessions of native title rights, increasingly affecting the social and cultural value of 'Larrakia country'. The Government party disputes this view, contending that any loss compared to the totality of land claimed as country by the native title parties is marginal or minor. However, evidence showed that Wickham Point is particularly significant to the native title parties because of the relatively ready access from the metropolitan region of Darwin.

....

Section 39(1)(a)(iv): Freedom of access.

Reference has already been made to this. Access is a vital issue for the native title parties, and the possible impact of the proposed acquisition and subsequent development ranges from total to negligible, depending upon the particular area of land or water concerned within the acquisition area.

Williamson noted that the NT Government party contended that no anthropological evidence was produced by either native title party that there are any areas or sites of particular significance within the boundaries of the acquisition areas [at Wickham Point]. However, of relevance are his comments about the 'incremental effect of successive dispossessions of native title rights, increasingly affecting the social and cultural value of "Larrakia country"'. For example, the continuing and perhaps inevitable change in the landscape threatens the basis of Larrakia religion which is integral with the physical features of the Darwin area, be that it may that the Larrakia knowledge of Dreamings stories is fragmentary.

Concerning the Dreaming tracks, there is little evidence of a track connecting Larrakia sites, apart from the well-documented Kenbi Dreaming across the harbour to sites at Emery Point Kulaluk and Casuarina. This is described as an underground 'pipeline' or tunnel crossing the harbour. Considering the developmental nature of Dreamings, it could be imagined that the symbolism of a major gas pipeline entering the harbour could be construed as being in conflict with the similar concept of the 'Kenbikenbi pipeline'.

Picturing an image of the dissecting paths of two opposing philosophies - exploiting the earth's resources and an animistic tradition of respect for natural powers - could generate conflict. This is the nature of Aboriginal Dreamings, as this chapter has discussed. However, an oppositional interpretation could be avoided by looking for the similarities of purpose, rather than the difference. It should also be remembered that the Kenbi dreaming path is deep underground while the gas pipeline is on the seabed.

In another section of this report I discuss the pragmatic Larrakia attitudes to development on their land at Kulaluk and elsewhere. Considering the care which Inpex has shown in identifying and avoiding

Larrakia significant sites, there is no reason other than inevitable change to the landscape to suppose Larrakia religion will not survive the Inpex developments at Blaydin Point and Howard Springs.

Finally, Heffernan (1996:10) has some timely advice: ‘It could be argued that if *Barragut* [whitefellas] wish to identify in some meaningful way to this *Larrikiya* country, to this region, then a recognition of traditional knowledge, culture, and sense of ownership would be a pre-requisite.’ He continues; ‘This shift in recognition of *Larrikiya* culture is vitally important in improving relationship between the *Larrikiya* and the *Barragut* and absolutely essential before any discussion of “shared identity” can be entertained’ (Heffernan 1996:17).

### **Recommendations**

- Interpretations of Dreamings sites should be made in the first instance by traditional people from the Larrakia language group.
- Monitoring of sites should be conducted as outlined in the Ichthys Gas Field development Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement.
- The Larrakia Heritage Management Committee (INPEX-Browse 2006:457) should be representative of the 14 family groups.