

The Railway Dam, or One Mile Dam land claim was heard by the Interim Aboriginal Land Commissioner Justice R (Dick) Ward in June, 1975, under the draft Land Rights Bill (hence the title “Interim”). The claim was defended for the Raknarara Bootong Association Inc by Darwin lawyer, John Waters LLB as a “needs claim”. Evidence of traditional connection is not necessary in a needs claim. However, in “Life Among the Aborigines” (1957:20), Bill Harney describes how “the old elders held their councils in the mangroves of 'Iwada' (railway dam)”.

Raknarara Bootong means “our land” in the language of the Wadjiginy people living on Cox Peninsula. Members of the incorporated association were frequent visitors and residents of the camp around the dam site on Dinah Beach Road, including a few non-Aboriginal supporters. Some of the members, like Tommy Lyons, Bobby Secretary and Norman Barral were Larrakia elders, while others, like Richard Rankin, Johnny Fejo and Peggy Wilson had a Larrakia ancestor. Older members and associates, like Felix Holmes, George Munggalu, Prince of Wales (Nipul), Nipper Rankin and Roy Mudpool, had participated in initiation ceremonies at the Larrakia ceremony ground on Emery Point (Felix Holmes in 1917). Almost all members were informants in the NLC's successful Kenbi land claim which began in the mid 1970s.

In the 1970s, the Mandorah and Micah Beach ferries terminated at Stokes Hill wharf, making the camp convenient for visitors from Delissaville, as the Aboriginal community of Belyuen was then known. A change of government in 1975, led to the passing of an amended Land Rights Act in 1976 which excluded needs claims and claims within town boundaries; however the 3.12ha Special Purpose Lease 454 was granted to the residents of One Mile Dam by Paul Everingham's government in March 1979, and the 301ha Kulaluk land claim to the Larrakia in August the same year.

Significantly, the Larrakia people lost their native title claim over Darwin in 2006, Justice Mansfield finding (Paragraph 14): “...the present society comprising the Larrakia people does not now have rights and interests possessed under the traditional laws acknowledged, and the traditional customs observed, by the Larrakia people at sovereignty.”

In contrast, on the Cox Peninsula the Kenbi Larrakia land claim under the Land Rights Act (1976) was successful because of the traditional knowledge of a local descent group known as “the Tommy Lyons group” and the supporting evidence of many of the same people who formed the One Mile Dam Raknarara Bootong Association who have kept Larrakia knowledge alive through their connection to Larrakia country and ancestors.

In summary, One Mile Dam was granted to the residents as a “needs claim”, although the dam itself has since been registered as a significant Larrakia site. The lasting agreement by Larrakia to support the One Mile Dam claim was founded on strong familial ties between the residents and the Larrakia. Although most of the old Larrakia have since died, the connections between the Larrakia traditional owners and the One Mile Dam residents remains strong through the surviving “Tommy Lyons group” and others of Larrakia descent who still reside at the Belyuen community on Cox Peninsula and at One Mile Dam.

Of concern, is the attempt by representatives of Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation (LNAC) to form a business partnership with “First Australian Hotel Pty Ltd” to construct a 242-bed hotel at One Mile Dam. ASIC records show the then Larrakia Nation CEO as a company director, with LNAC holding 27000 shares, and “Beyond Business Connections Pty Ltd” holding an equal number.

The NT News reported on 26 September, 2013, page 2, “Aboriginal service provider Larrakia Nation is negotiating with the Aboriginal Development Foundation for the leases on One Mile Dam, Knuckeyes Lagoon camp and Palmerston Indigenous Village”. On 15 November, 2013, page 4, a long-term resident of the community responded angrily to the Larrakia Nation plans for a hotel on the site under the heading, “One Mile Dam resident slams profit-making plans”.