**One Mile Dam: Inside the Aboriginal community fighting to survive.**

By Aiesha Saunders and Ella Archibald-Binge

February 24, 2020

The community of One Mile Dam in Darwin has been home to Aboriginal people for thousands of years, but residents fear they could soon be pushed out to make way for inner-city developments.

A sacred site with deep cultural connections, it’s one of about 40 town camps across the Northern Territory which historically served as refuges for Aboriginal people, who were barred under discriminatory laws from living in urban areas until the 1970s.

In 1978, after a lengthy land rights battle, One Mile Dam was leased to the Indigenous community in perpetuity, to “provide a permanent place for Aboriginal people to stay when they come to Darwin”.

Sitting on 3 hectares of what is now prime real estate among inner-city apartment blocks, the camp is home to around 10 permanent residents and provides a safe haven for dozens of others who are homeless or visiting from remote communities. Numbers swell to up to 100 people during the wet season.

But there are concerns for the camp’s future, after the Northern Territory Labor government earmarked sections of the land for potential redevelopment for “residential and open space” in its Central Darwin Area Plan, released late last year.

Furthermore, the government’s framework to reform town camps across the Territory cites plans to “work with leaseholders to voluntarily transfer Special Purpose Leases to Crown Leases to enable the diverse use of land”.

Rosemary Timber, an advocate for the residents whose mother Mindy lives at One Mile Dam, said: “They’re trying to take the whole place.”

The lease on One Mile Dam is held by the Aboriginal Development Foundation, which is run by Bernie Valadian. Mr Valadian is non-Indigenous.

Mr Valadian said there were “meetings at the moment going on” to discuss the possibility of transferring the lease, but declined to say who was looking to take over as leaseholder or whether the NT government was involved.

A spokesman for the NT Planning Department said the government had “no plans to rezone One Mile Dam for future developments” and any planning documents referencing the site do not “mandate any specific vision” for the area.

Robert Cooper, chief executive of Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation, said there were “ongoing discussions” between the Larrakia people, the foundation and the Territory government about the future of the lease.

The government said it had not received a formal request to transfer the lease.

Ms Timber, whose family has lived on the land for more than 30 years, said the community had long been under threat due to its location in a high-development area. Her father, David Timber, fought to keep the land in Aboriginal hands until his death in 2016.

Fresh fears arose late last year, when the government’s housing maintenance provider, Yilli Housing, told tenants the majority of homes at the camp would be demolished for safety reasons.

Yilli Housing chief executive Leeanne Caton said those plans had since been abandoned.

The government said it had an “open dialogue” with residents regarding the site’s future through the leaseholder. But Mr Valadian refused to say whether tenants were privy to these conversations.

Federal Minister for Indigenous Australians Ken Wyatt said residents should have a say on any “future developments”.

“I encourage the Northern Territory government and the local housing provider to work closely with the One Mile Dam community to ensure residents are provided with appropriate housing,” he said. Ms Timber said multiple requests for new houses and repairs had gone unanswered for decades, with the exception of her mother’s house, which was upgraded last year.

“One Mile Dam is what it is because of … inaction over many years,” she said.

“Living conditions are poor ... but this should not be a reason to remove One Mile Dam from the map and turn it into a road or government sale for some other purpose.”

Ms Caton said Yilli Housing received “limited” government funding for property management.

PHOIOS: A man known as Anthony points out where a new road was built through One Mile Dam land. One Mile Dam sits on prime real estate on the edge of Darwin's CBD.

Credit: Darrian Traynor/Getty Images

Alfred Woody (pictured) and other residents say they are not being consulted about the future of their home. Credit: Darrian Traynor/Getty Images

<https://www.smh.com.au/national/one-mile-dam-inside-the-aboriginal-community-fighting-to-survive-20200207-h1lnro.html>