

Conclusion

Larrakia traditional ownership of the Darwin area was acknowledged and accepted by the colonisers from the time of non-Aboriginal settlement. What becomes evident from the historical sources available, is that the Larrakia played a highly visible and significant part in the social, cultural and economic development of the emerging settlement. Although it is likely that long-term, non-Aboriginal residents of Darwin and Aboriginal people themselves persistently acknowledged that the Larrakia were the traditional owners of Darwin the introduction of legislation designed for the 'welfare' of Aborigines and the influx of other Aboriginal groups to Darwin impacted significantly on the role and the position of the Larrakia in Darwin. Apart from severely disrupting Larrakia traditional life, legislation which sought to control the movement and lives of Aboriginal people in the Darwin region served to obscure the role and identity of the Larrakia as perceived by non-Aborigines. Within a reasonably short period of time the Larrakia were no longer considered 'traditional owners' but 'urban Aborigines' devoid of the characteristics of 'Aboriginal culture' as defined by non-Aborigines. It must then have come as some surprise to non-Aboriginal people who believed that the Larrakia had 'fallen before the tide of colonialism' to witness the emergence of a local political group reclaiming Aboriginal land in Darwin and demanding that Larrakia traditional ownership be recognised. The Kulaluk claim together with protests in support of Aboriginal land and civil rights during the 1960s and 1970s serve as testimony to an undying spirit and sense of identity of Aborigines in the Darwin area. The national significance of this action within the Aboriginal land rights movement was voiced by concerned officials who believed that what was happening at Kulaluk could set a precedent for urban Aboriginal land rights throughout Australia. These fears were soon allayed by the passage of the Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act and although discussions at Kulaluk have shown that much of the knowledge of the long fight for Kulaluk is retained by those who were present the struggle has, until recently, remained untold in terms of the broader Aboriginal land rights movement or seen as a visible, recognised part of Darwin's history.

Peter Biskup's history of race relations during the early settlement of Western Australia notes the 'absence of any noticeable influence of Aboriginal culture on the shaping of the emerging colonial society' (Biskup 1973:265). Except for the use of a few Aboriginal place names and the incorporation of some words of Aboriginal origin into the language, Biskup suggests 'the Aborigines had added nothing to the variety of Australian life' although he later admits 'a nagging suspicion that the Aborigines must have had some causality in Australian life' (Biskup 1973:266). A consideration of Aboriginal heritage and the environment has not featured in much of the history so far constructed for Darwin. The Larrakia were categorised as a decimated race, fallen before the tide of colonialism and the new settlement of Darwin was characterised as bearing 'the appearance of an unplanned shanty town waiting forlornly for something to turn up' (Reece 1989:311). These caricatures exclude any analysis of the 'sense of place' or environment in shaping the history, identity or character of a place and make it difficult to 'see' the Larrakia as a vital, dynamic force within the history that has been constructed. The appropriation of land for non-Aboriginal use, dramatic changes in the landscape and the implementation of a series of policies which sought to control and institutionalise the movement and lives of Aborigines in Darwin have created particular images and memories for a place which override previous images, memories and identities as well as impacting on the ongoing representations of the Larrakia as Darwin's traditional owners and a sense of Darwin having an Aboriginal heritage.

Woodward and Ward both recommended that the Kulaluk lease be granted in recognition of Larrakia traditional ownership and more broadly to serve as an Aboriginal 'needs claim'. However the final granting of the lease came after many negotiations between the Gwalwa Daraniki Association and the Northern Territory Administration/Government which resulted in a smaller area than Ward proposed being granted, a major road cut through the middle of the lease and the positioning of

'transient camps' for Aboriginal people on the Kulaluk lease. Today, Kulaluk is characterised as a town camp¹ and issues related to the provision of housing, health, education and legal services, while recognised as vital, have become the focus of non-Aboriginal interactions with and perceptions of Kulaluk. Attitudes towards the Kulaluk community are also affected by broader non-Aboriginal perceptions of urban dwelling Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders which were recently defined as being formed by a 'lack of knowledge about the past' and a 'lack of knowledge about contemporary urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander society and culture' which leaves 'non-Aboriginal opinion unduly susceptible to negative claims and stereotypes propagated by a small proportion of racists' (Australia 1992:208). Little is consequently known by 'outsiders' of the fight for Kulaluk and residents, like urban Aborigines elsewhere, have not been perceived to have or maintain a distinct Aboriginal culture within an urban setting. Langton asserts that there is a general failure to recognise the 'Aboriginality' of life for Aborigines in urban environments and further suggests that urban Aboriginal 'society' and 'culture' must be seen as 'complete, integrated and consistent systems relevant to their members - not merely as a truncated (or castrated) version of any other socio-cultural systems' (Langton 1981:20).

A 1989 report on Aboriginal town camps suggests that there has been a lack of support and long term planning for Darwin's town camps and that the 'responsible agencies' have dealt with them in a 'relatively haphazard manner' because it is believed that 'town camps are as transient as the people that use them, and as a consequence the delivery of services, in the form of permanent structures, would be both a waste of resources, and counterproductive to the Government's long-term plans' (Woodhead 1989:1). In light of the permanency of town camps, the necessity of providing 'Aboriginal residents of these areas with assistance in the development of culturally appropriate services' was recommended (Woodhead 1989:1). Many of the recommendations made in the early 1980s for the more effective management of the Kulaluk lease remain valid today yet a management plan created after full consultation with members of the Kulaluk community in conjunction with town planners has not either been constructed or implemented. Rehabilitation of the Kulaluk lease after years of such environmental degradation as the excavation of sand and gravel, the dumping of rubbish and the construction of inefficient and damaging drainage systems would be an enormous task but one which committed town planners in full consultation and agreement with the community could achieve. The spread of noxious weeds, the presence of feral animals, the monitoring of illegal activities such as dumping and uncontrolled fires on the lease are all areas which need attention on the Kulaluk lease. As bush foods constitute an important part of Kulaluk residents' diets, people there recognise that it is important to retain and rehabilitate areas of natural bush on the lease to facilitate the collection of this food. Local Aborigines and appropriate bodies could jointly manage the conservation of areas on the lease and the surrounding waters.

Management of the Gwalwa Daraniki Association is constrained by limited formal education, lack of skills and experience as well as the huge task at hand. Culturally appropriate training for interested members of the Kulaluk community together with the inclusion of Aboriginal interests and aspirations in future town planning by Government town planners may improve this situation. Aboriginal people in Darwin comprise and lead a significant part of the work force in such areas as health, housing, education and legal service. As the Aboriginal Land Rights Act has excluded the Northern Land Council from becoming involved with land in town areas, Aborigines have not yet become extensively involved with land management issues in the Darwin area. As the land, sea and its resources continue to be a vital part of urban Aboriginal

¹ In a 1982 House of Representatives Standing Committee report, *Strategies to Help Overcome the Problems of Aboriginal Town Camps*, the Aboriginal Development Commission considered that certain groups on Special Purpose Leases within the Northern Territory should come within the definition of 'town camps' since 'they clearly have shown what fringe-dwelling groups can achieve when they are given some recognition and support from Government sources' (Australia 1982:16).

peoples lives it is important that Aboriginal people have a voice in the management of their 'country'. As this study shows the Gwalwa Daraniki Association have persistently continued to fight to maintain the integrity of their lease. The Gwalwa Daraniki Association must have recourse to advisers who are not politically or economically motivated but who put the interests of the Kulaluk community first. The Northern Territory Government has shown a distinct disregard for conservation values or an awareness of the environmental uniqueness of such a city as Darwin through its support of such developments as Cullen Bay Marina, the Bayview Haven Estate and proposed plans for Sadgroves Creek. Areas such as mangrove swamps have been perceived as wasteland and 'undeveloped' areas become the focus of development interests in a city based on a narrow peninsula with limited land available for inner city commercial development. This 'positioning' has posed problems for Kulaluk in the past and may continue to do so. The telling of such histories as this one may impact on a concern for Aboriginal, environmental and colonial heritage in future town planning.

Further research could look at the impact of the Larrakia on non-Aboriginal settlement rather than vice versa as is often the case. This research would be facilitated by an acceptance of new historical methodology which recognises the possibilities for multiple stories, events and perspectives occurring in place and time. By not privileging one event over another and by recognising that history is a continuing process which defines present and ongoing relationships between groups of people it may be possible to provide a fuller, more honest and inclusive account of Darwin's history. As Rose and Lewis point out:

... For the past two hundred years the social life of Australia has implicated all the people, directly or indirectly, in relationships which involve each other. Rather than white history or black history, what we keep finding in our research is the history of human beings in association (positively, negatively, ambivalently, absurdly, tragically, but almost invariably side by side) with each other on this continent (Rose and Lewis 1992:28).

Cultural continuity and change has made for a distinct urban Aboriginal culture in Darwin of which the Larrakia historically and currently play a major part. The land continues to hold meaning and so too do the interactions between Aboriginal groups and non-Aborigines formed since colonisation. The way in which newer Darwin residents see themselves in the landscape and the level of importance attached to Aboriginal sites compared to the general perception of what constitutes 'heritage' in Darwin must also be considered.

The challenge being posed by Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory is for our heritage to be acknowledged and accepted by others as an intrinsic part of 'the story of the Northern Territory'. It means accepting the validity of our experiences and our knowledge, and the active participation and support of the heritage 'industry' in recognising the importance of the living heritage of indigenous Australians ... If we are to 'manage a shared heritage', the history we learn and commemorate should be the history of all our peoples, and not just those now celebrated on the 'historic markers' down the track (Ah Kit 1994:20).

If Darwin is to become a cosmopolitan, multi-cultural, multi-racial town it is time that more commitment was given to recognising the heritage and ongoing history of its traditional owners. The fight for Kulaluk and the resultant refocussing of the perception of the Larrakia as Darwin's past, present and future traditional owners should be a part of that history.

Appendix One

Summary of Recommendations from the Aboriginal Land Commissioner's Aboriginal Land Rights Second Report

1. Planning for Aborigines in towns must involve consulting them to discover their wishes. Their preferences will range from normal town houses, through clustered community accommodation to permanent facilities for camping.
2. Such preferences, along with tribal affiliations, must all be provided for in town planning and in the provision of housing funds.
3. Aborigines should, generally speaking, be housed or otherwise accommodated in the places where they are accustomed to live, provided that is their wish.
4. Regional Land Councils should each assign an officer to find out the housing requirements of Aborigines in towns within the region.
5. The Land Councils should then make submissions to town planning authorities and to the Aboriginal Land Commission.
6. The Land Commission after considering these submissions, making its own investigations and consulting with planning authorities, should make recommendations to the Government concerning the acquisition of the necessary land for Aborigines in towns.
7. Where monies are required for such acquisitions, they should come from the Aboriginal Land Fund. It is expected that such purposes would probably receive a high priority because the need is so pressing in many places.
8. By the end of 1976 all Aboriginal groups, except those actually travelling, should be living on land where they are content to be and where they have a recognised right to be, because it is held on their behalf by Aboriginal trustees.
9. Land held for Aborigines in towns should have the same tenure as is normal in each town. The holders should be trustees, approved corporations or community councils as appropriate in the particular case.
10. Land should be acquired for Aborigines at Kulaluk and, unless there are very strong arguments to the contrary, Railway Dam.
11. The Bagot Reserve should be leased to a committee of residents and the terms of the lease should protect the rights of transients to use the area (Woodward 1974:paragraph 328).

Appendix Two

Petition from the West Ludmilla Residents Action Group presented to the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly in October 1975

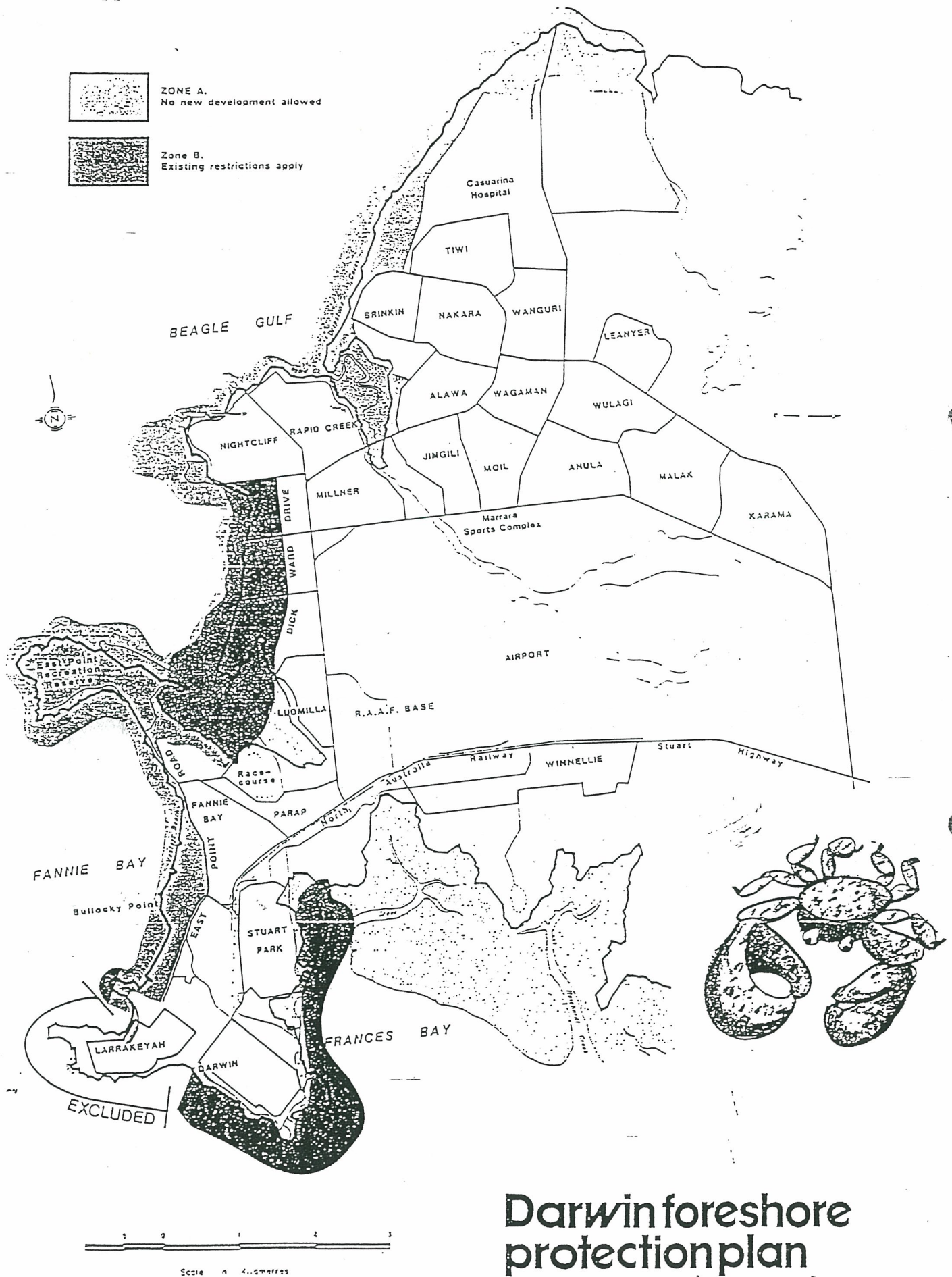
This humble petition of interested citizens of the Northern Territory respectfully sheweth that there is widespread public concern relating to indiscriminate Aboriginal land claims being out to the Interim Aboriginal Land Commission.

Your petitioners therefore humbly pray:

1. That land claims should not be allowed to be put to the Commission in relation to established residential and business areas set up by the present and past governments and whereby established residents may be displaced.
2. That such claims, because of their protracted nature, are causing emotional stress and strain upon residents in such areas and are causing a feeling of uncertainty in their future.
3. That such claims result in loss of time and money to residents in the claimed area in attending and being legally represented at such Land Commissions.
4. That the areas recommended by the Aboriginal Land Commission to be passed into Aboriginal ownership be subject to discussion and vote in the Legislative Assembly as to the passing over of legal title in such land as such matters will materially affect the heritage of all Australians whatever their racial origins.

And your petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray (Northern Territory Parliamentary Debates Tuesday 14 October 1975:541).

Appendix Three



Darwin foreshore protection plan