

MEDIA BACKGROUND FOR ONE MILE DAM 31st ANNIVERSARY 1979 – 2010.

TO BE COMMEMORATED ON MARCH 26TH, 2010 AT OMD, Dinah Beach Road, Stuart Park.

NT News, July 13, 1972, p.6, 'Dinah Beach Campers complain of neglect.' For 15 years they have camped on an area behind Dinah beach which they call Japanee Beach. The camp has no shelter, no toilet facilities and no water supply. They said they prefer to stay at the camp rather than at Bagot Reserve or even their home country at Delissaville because there was 'too much trouble there.'

Judge A E Woodward, *Aboriginal Land Rights Commission, Final report, 1974, pp. 54-55:* 'The second case I want to refer to is that of the area known as One-Mile Dam or Railway Dam. This is a place at which a number of Aborigines have been camped over a period of years. They have recently formed themselves into the Raknurara Bootong Association Incorporated and submissions have been made to me by counsel [John Waters] on behalf of that Association. They have obtained the services of an architect to show how this area could be developed as a semi-permanent Aboriginal campsite. They put the case to the Darwin Town Planning Board at the same time that a case was being put that some part of the land should be made available as a campsite for transients other than Aborigines. The Town Planning board approved the use of the area as a campsite for Aborigines and others but the Administrator's Council rejected both the recommendations in favour, as I understand it of the use of the land for purpose of a public park. It seems that the proponents of the use of part of the land for non-Aborigines have accepted the defeat of their proposals and are now looking elsewhere. However the Raknurara Bootong Association is pressing its claims on behalf of Aborigines. **I can only say that, in pursuance of the principles outlined above, this seems to be a case where Aboriginal wishes should be met. Where else is it suggested that they should camp? Why should they not have reserved for their use the area which they have used for a number of years?** There may be answers to these questions but, on the face of it, it seems to me that this claim on behalf of Aborigines is well founded and should receive sympathetic consideration from the relevant authorities – particularly in view of the support of the Town Planning Board.'

March 26th, 1979, *Northern Territory News*, 'City Camp – handing over of dam site':

A special purpose lease to Darwin's old railway dam area was given to local Aborigines this morning. The lease, made out to the Aboriginal Development Foundation, was handed over by the Minister for Lands and Housing, Mr Marshall Perron. Mr Perron said he was very pleased the lease had now been prepared. He said, 'It's been through various ropes and various governments. There is a lot of work to be done but it is a great step forward. It will provide a permanent place for Aboriginal people to stay when they come to Darwin.'

Mr Perron said itinerant campers around towns and cities created problems for themselves and others. 'It is best for all concerned if land is allocated and used to meet the needs of Aborigines who wish to live as a community in the urban environs,' he added. 'The people can now move to improvements to their surroundings confident they have secure title to the area.'

Adrian Welke and Helen J Wilson *Darwin Central Area Heritage Study, 1992:* [The dam] on what was once called Donald's Flat, appears to have been initially built to water the first formal gardens site. These were established under the auspices of the second government resident, G B Scott, by the gardener, William B Hayes in 1871. The first town maps show Horse (or Burton's) Creek running through the site of the reservoir. The gardens were moved to Fannie Bay some years later and the dam enlarged and made extensive use of after construction of the Palmerston to Pine Creek railway had commenced in 1886. By June 1926 both the Dam (then known as One Mile Dam) and Horse Creek had been extensively canalised and were important factors in the town's water and drainage. The site is now an important Aboriginal area close to the centre of town.

Bunji Newsletter, April 1978; also Bunji: the story of the Gwalwa Daraniki Movement, 1994, by Bill Day, pp.89-90. Before the cyclone, the dam was shaded by great paperbark trees and a favourite place for birdlife or children swimming, swinging from the branches into the clear water. Now most of the paperbarks lie rotting in the water and an ugly cover of weed is spreading over the still surface. [Rusty says], 'People come with big mob of money but they ask for blankets, buy grog and make trouble all night. We are relatives together but they have got to have their own place, fight for it like we did...'

NT News, March 26, 1979.: [The Minister for Lands and Housing, Mr Perron said] 'It is best for all concerned if land is allocated and used to meet the needs of Aborigines who wish to live as a community in

the urban environs. The people can now move to make improvements to their surroundings confident they have secure title to the area.'

Warwick Stanley, *NT News*, November 15, 1996. 'Families told to leave their city home.' The NT Government is set to order the closure of a well-established and well-maintained Aboriginal town camp in the heart of Darwin. The Railway Dam camp site houses up to 12 Aboriginal families and also hosts remote community visitors. It will be removed as part of plans to relocate the Frances Bay [oil] tank farm. The picturesque and well-hidden campsite is located off Dinah Beach Road, between Tiger Brennan Drive and Duke Street, less than a kilometre from the city centre. Mr Karadara, 44, who has lived at the camp since the 1960s, said the move would uproot a community that had never contemplated having to leave. He said: 'We've never had any trouble here and no one bothered us. This is our land. We don't have anywhere else to go... Why can't they make a park somewhere else? This is our home'.

Warwick Stanley, *NT News* November 16, 1996, p.6. 'Battle for Darwin camp is on again.' Lands Minister Mike Reed yesterday said the camp did not fit plans for the relocation of the Frances Bay tank farm and development of an inner city residential area... Bill Day said: "For me it's total deja vu".

Rod del Nido, *NT News*, March 27, 1997. 'Fight vow: we'll keep our camp.' Camp resident David Timber said the children that lived at the camp enjoyed better access to education by living at the site. He said: 'We take pride in our camp. Usually when it comes to education, Aboriginal kids don't always get to the higher grades at school. Whereas by living here at One Mile camp the kids attend various Darwin schools which provide a lot of help and back-up for them. In Aboriginal communities they don't get that sort of support.'

Geoff Thompson, *ABC 7.30 Report* September 28, 1997: NT Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment, Mike Reed: '[The tank farm] will be a class residential development close to the Central Business District of Darwin, very convenient for people, offering great opportunities for development and a good place to live - and it will include large areas of open space.'

William B Day's 2001 PhD Thesis (UWA), *Fringe dwellers in Darwin: cultural persistence or a culture of resistance?* Chapter 3 (From Mick Lambe's *People Against Racism in Aboriginal Home lands [PARIAH] website*): - After the threat to transform the lease into a public park, one of several support letters stated: 'The people of Railway Dam belong there. They "fit in"' (*NT News* December 3, 1996). Radio talkback was strongly in favour of keeping the town camp. Another letter reflected a growing class-based opposition to the development of the land for the benefit of elites: 'We want to live in a society where commercial development is the top priority, don't we? The preposterous proposal to move the camp at One Mile Dam is in the interests of only a minority of people. To let the camp remain would benefit the families who live there, and serve as a valuable lesson in tolerance' (*NT News* November 23, 1996).

Pamphlet printed by the NLC in 2004 and still on the Longgrass website: 'Larrakia people support the residents of Railway Dam': A meeting of Larrakia people at Lee Point in November last year condemned the Northern Territory Government's decision to evict the Aboriginal residents [of OMD]. Elders explained that the dam was a site of an important dreaming story. The dam was also the site of a spring that Larrakia people had pointed out to Goyder when he first came to Darwin. It had been an important meeting and camping place since before living memory.

<longgrass.tripod.com> In May 2003, David Timber said: '[The MLA for Port Darwin] asked me if I was to leave OMD would I go back to Daly River? Now that's something really hit me...I said I'd probably see what happens here first, not saying anything. How would she feel if I ask her to go back to the state she comes from? You know, that was a bit... I didn't expect that and I felt a bit like, ah, shocked when she said that.'

Longgrass Magazine, October 2003, p.7: David Timber: ‘There are more people here now than there was 4 months ago...A lot of them asked me if they could stay here and a lot of them are pretty well happy now that they have moved in. We’ve got mobs of people. That mob who have been living on the outskirts of town, in the coffee bushes, in tents...Yeah, they find it’s somewhere to stay. They got a roof over their head. It will be rain time soon and most of these mob will have shelter. But the trouble is overcrowding in the houses. You got 3 or 4 couples in a house and you’ve got people coming in from out of town.’

From <onemiledam.org.au> web site:

On Friday 10th September 2004, Senator Amanda Vanstone - Federal Minister for Indigenous Affairs voiced her belief that the residents needed to know exactly where they stood regarding tenure, before any substantial work could be undertaken.

Steve Spencer, Senior Lecturer in Sociology, Sheffield Hallam University, UK. Letter to OMD Community, 2004: People internationally should be outraged that such conditions should exist in an affluent supposed democracy like Australia. The stark contrast between wealthy white suburbanites and fringe dwelling indigenous peoples seemed to me to indicate the most cynical and exploitative colonial attitudes still alive and well in the 21st Century.

David Timber - Kumbutjil Association: ‘I read somewhere during the Bosnian war... I think about “ethnic cleansing” well I’m beginning to think that that’s what’s happening here.’

Steve Spencer, ‘Framing the fringe dwellers’ Another smaller community with less formal status, closer to the city centre, is the One Mile Dam Community. The lack of services here was very apparent when I visited in July 2004. The camp was set up for indigenous people in the 1970s and has received little help or improvement since then. This camp can swell to accommodate nearly 200 people and has only 2 toilets, piles of refuse fester in the heat and recent reports have cited faulty wiring exposing residents to danger of electrocution there. In addition nearby fuel storage tanks overlook the community presenting an ever-present threat from volatile fumes and residents worry about the pollution of the billabong which was considered a place of special significance to the community. The new luxury apartments overlook the community signifying another threat to the community - as developers look to expand and use the community land for future developments.

Kathy Newnam, ‘Dodging responsibility’ *Green Left Weekly*, November 3, 2004: The Kumbutjil Association has requested that it become the leaseholder, which Timber believes would make a lot of difference. The Aboriginal Development Foundation has held the lease since it was granted in 1979. On October 6, the Kumbutjil Association unanimously passed a motion of no confidence in the foundation and its manager, Bernie Valadian. According to Timber, “We just didn’t have any confidence in the ADF anymore because of the neglect that we’ve suffered for a long, long time”.

Interview <Longgrass.tripod.com> David Timber: ‘Government want us out because of development people and move us further down or out of Darwin. They don’t want an Aboriginal Town Camp nearby to their development plan. It decreases property values. It’s an attitude of a lot of people; I feel that a lot of it is the responsibility of the government. The government doesn’t want any blackfellas around town, or wherever there’s going to be developed and they’re reinforcing that attitude on everyone by how they act toward Aboriginal people.’

Rebecca Hewett, *NT News*, April 29th 2004, ‘City Community Living in Squalor.’

John Loizou, *The Darwin Sun*, May 5, 2004, p.1: ‘We will not be moved’. City tank farms to go, but campers fight to stay put: [Mr Valadian (ADF)] conceded that he was working with Government planners to incorporate the campsite into a “precinct for the entire area” and that this could include “public parkland”, to compliment new residential housing. He also hinted that the residents could be relocated... [The ADF] had not spent money on improvements because the residents would not pay rent... Mr Timber argues that he will pay the rent when the improvements are made.

Stella Smith, *Indigenous Law Bulletin*, December/January 2006 (6)16:15-16. National Shame Job: David Timber, Community leader, One Mile Dam: ‘People might say it’s development and you can’t stand in

the way of development – that’s bullshit. You can’t just go kicking blackfellas around all over the place. We’ve been dispossessed already, we’re still being dispossessed now – being told to move out from here.’

Ben Langford, *Sunday Territorian*, October 28, 2007, p.6. ‘One Mile residents won’t move an inch’: Long-term resident and president of the site’s Kumbutjil Association David Timber said residents would fight any forced eviction. “My old mob fought to get that place,” he said.

***NT News*, October 29, 2007, p.7: One Milers dig in.**

Northern Territory Legislative Assembly, Hansard for 29th November 2007

MLA Gerry Wood: In the Northern Territory News on 28 October it was stated that the people of One Mile Dam had vowed to stand their ground in the face of the Territory government to redevelop the site. The Northern Territory News went on to say the Chief Minister Clare Martin refused to say whether the residents would be moved against their wishes. Are you going to move these people against their wishes? Why cannot Aboriginal people live on their own land near the CBD or is this the case that the One Mile Dam will not look good amongst the new up market development proposed next door?

Minister for Planning and Lands Delia Lawrie: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Nelson for his question. The area in which One Mile Dam is located is around the tank farms. As members can appreciate, those tank farms have been relocated out of the Stuart Park area. As part of creating Darwin’s future, the Northern Territory government through the Chief Minister went out on a very extensive public consultation asking people did they want to see vast park land there in what we refer to as the old Stuart Park tank farm area. I can report the overwhelming feed back from the public was that they think having a park land in the old Stuart Park tank farm area is fantastic. The information that went out to the public and that was in shopping centres, that was very broadly consulted and discussed always had the area of One Mile Dam highlighted as proposed future park land. Now the government is currently considering the information that came back, we will be sitting down and talking to the residents of One Mile Dam. We are at the start of the next transit of consultation and it is very important to sit down with the people who live in that area and find out exactly what their housing needs are if they were to move. It is very early days at the start of a consultation with the residents of One Mile Dam to find out what their personal circumstances are and what they would require if they were to move.

ABC Indigenous TV, Message Stick, 2005: In the heart of Darwin’s newly developed area of inner city apartment living lies a small Aboriginal community, neglected, and fighting for its rights of ownership. This is the story of another Aboriginal unsung hero, David Timber and his fight for basic human rights. The community is one mile from the centre of town. It’s nestled in amongst huge fuel tanks and newly developed apartment blocks. The houses are made of tin, which do little to protect the residents from the heat of the build-up or the rain and cold of the dry season.

Rebecca Hewett, *NT News*, August 31, 2005, ‘Bacteria kills man’: A man died from melioidosis bacteria after jumping into a dam near Darwin CBD. Inquest findings handed down on Friday found [the man] died in jail on June 13, 2004 – 18 days after being submerged in One Mile Dam at Stuart Park in Darwin. Melioidosis expert Professor Bart Currie told the inquest the man probably contracted the bacteria by breathing it in.

Lindsay Murdoch, *Sydney Morning Herald*, June 22, 2007, p.1. ‘Out here the tears never dry.’ David Timber, the community’s leader, had heard about the Federal Government’s dramatic intervention on the radio. He wanted to know where the pledge was for millions of dollars to improve housing. ‘Look around you here,’ he said. ‘We have had no help for years. You can see that for yourself. What I am worried about is that the banning of grog out in the remote communities will only lead to many Aboriginal people coming into the city and towns to drink. They will end up being dumped here.’

Letter from OMD to Mal Brough, October 9th, 2007: Ever since the land was assigned to us we have been living here in uncertainty as tenants of the ADF and with continued threats by town planners to be moved

aside for a park to serve the residents of the new Stuart Park apartments. The Federal intervention has further added to the uncertainty for OMD residents.

A large sign has appeared at the gate to OMD stating in big letters 'WARNING PRESCRIBED AREA - NO LIQUOR - NO PORNOGRAPHY'. The sign tells us that enquiries are to be directed to 'The Australian Government's Emergence Response Hotline'. The sign at our gate suggests that we have a problem with pornography, which we do not. It is against our culture. The sign unnecessarily distinguishes us from the community of Stuart Park and embarrasses us when we have visitors. It might not be out of place on the banks of the East Alligator River, by the Border Store, but hardly appropriate for a little town camp like OMD. No doubt this is the result of the 'one size fits all' intervention ... We have become **no more than tenants** on land being held by an absentee landlord who does nothing for us. This is not what we fought for in the 1970s. The same would apply at Knuckeyes Lagoon, an urban community with a similar history to our own. For this reason we are asking for a full and open enquiry into the finances and affairs of the ADF.

ABC News, Wed August 20, 2008: Larrakia Nation's Donna Jackson says discussions are currently underway with Government to build an aged care centre and childcare centre at One Mile Dam, a small Aboriginal community on the fringes of Darwin's CBD. Ms Jackson says the two centres in the same spot would mean Larrakia culture could be passed smoothly between generations.

Letter from OMD to Marion Scrymgour, 21st February 2008: Since the so called Federal 'Intervention', which you so bravely spoke out against last year, rumours have spread that the Federal Government has taken over the lease of OMD and other town camps, and that the Aboriginal Development Foundation (ADF) has requested millions of dollars compensation for the loss of assets.

Letter from NT Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority 29th January 2009: 'One Mile Dam was officially recorded by the Authority in 1996, but with increasing development within the CBD and adjacent areas has put enormous pressure on custodians to have the site registered. Sites we have listed as 'registered sacred sites' are sacred sites that Aboriginal custodians have asked the Authority to protect and have subsequently been documented and evaluated by the Authority in accordance with the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1989* and placed on the Public Register... Upon receiving a request to register One Mile Dam in 2006/2007 the Authority underwent extensive consultations with custodians and formally registered the **Site 5073-115** under Section 29 of the *Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1989* at the September 2008 Authority Board Meeting... Description – a spring area close to the Darwin CBD, off Dinah Beach road, that was dug out and dammed in 1897 to create One Mile (or Railway) Dam.'

Reply to AAPA, February 14, 2009: The residents and Mr Timber may not recognise the custodians that are listed on the register as having any particular rights over the site that are superior to the rights of the residents who made the claim in the first place and have occupied the site continually since at least 1971. Although your recognition of the importance of OMD to Aboriginal people is overdue, the possibility that this would affect the control now held by the residential custodians at OMD would not be a welcome development for them....If the NT Government is negotiating with the ADF concerning acquisition and compensation, no doubt the OMD residents will lodge an injunction on the grounds that the negotiations are unconstitutional under the ADF constitution. Although entitled to be members of the ADF, the OMD residents have formed the Kumbutjil Association to give themselves some control over their future after years of neglect by the leaseholder.

Paul Toohey, *The Australian*, February 27th, 2009, p.2: At Darwin's One-Mile Dam, a tiny inner city Aboriginal enclave, the locals reckon nothing's changed since Mr Rudd gave his apology about 12 months ago. 'It's still the same here,' Rosemary Timber says. 'We still living in rubbish and squalor.'

Text of protest postcard to NT Minister for Planning and Lands, January 2009:

On March 26th, 1979, the NT Minister for Lands and Housing, Marshall Perron returned 3.12 hectares of land to the One Mile Dam Aboriginal community. At the hand-over, Mr Perron stated: 'The people can now move to make improvements to their surroundings confident they have a secure title to the area.' However,

for over ten years the One Mile Dam the community has been living under threat of eviction by the NT Government, to make way for a park. In that time the Aboriginal Development Foundation which holds the lease has done nothing to improve living conditions in the community. **Despite their meager resources, David Timber and his community at OMD have accommodated over 7,000 homeless people in the past 12 months.** The dam itself is an historic site and a registered Aboriginal sacred site. Now we are told that a compulsory acquisition is imminent. Please reconsider your decision and make true the promise of security of tenure for One Mile Dam.

Nadja Hainke, NT News, 27 March, 2009. ‘One Mile Dam marks its birthday with a protest.’ About 60 people gathered yesterday to protest against the federal intervention and ‘government neglect’ of the community. They also feared the Territory Government would turn the camp into a park area.

Aboriginal actor, David Gulpilil came to lend his support. ‘We need this land. Where else should a blackfella live?’ he said. But Chief Minister Paul Henderson denied there were any ‘immediate plans’ to forcibly remove people from the area.

PROTEST BANNERS FOR THE 31st ANNIVERSARY ON MARCH 26, 2010.

Banner at the dam: **THIS IS NOT A WAVE POOL.**

Banner at a OMD house: **THIS IS NOT PARLIAMENT HOUSE.**

Banner on OMD shelter shed: **THIS IS NOT A CONVENTION CENTRE.**

Other banners: **‘N.T. GOVT GUILTY OF CRIMINAL NEGLIGENCE’** (*The Australian*)