

October 17th is the 40th anniversary of the Larrakia petition to Queen Elizabeth II, described by the National Archives of Australia in 2011 as, “one of the most important documents in the history of Indigenous Australians’ struggle for land rights”. Containing over 1,000 signatures on pages pasted into a 3.3-metre scroll, the petition was to be presented to Princess Margaret during her visit to the Northern Territory in October 1972.

The Editor

The Australian

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Dear Sir/Madam

October 17th is the 40th anniversary of the Larrakia petition to Queen Elizabeth II, described by the National Archives of Australia in 2011 as, “one of the most important documents in the history of Indigenous Australians’ struggle for land rights”. Containing over 1,000 signatures on pages pasted into a 3.3-metre scroll, the petition was to be presented to Princess Margaret during her visit to the Northern Territory in October 1972. Although over 150 Aboriginal protesters gathered outside Government House in Darwin hoping to gain an audience with the Royal visitor, no opportunity arose. The next day, on October 17th, as the Royal Party were heading to the airport, in desperation an Aboriginal man charged at police lines with the rolled petition under his arm. After that final attempt failed, the battle-scarred document was posted to Buckingham Palace with an apology for its torn condition, to be forgotten as the desire for land rights became a reality following the election of the Whitlam government months later.

Today, few people are aware of the influential role of the land rights movement in Darwin in the crucial period between the 1971 Gove decision and the eventual passing of the Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act in 1976. Apart from the remarkable revival of the Larrakia people to over 1,600 members, the most obvious legacy of those years is 301-hectares of urban bush and mangroves in suburban Darwin granted to Larrakia in 1979, now increasingly under threat as land that was once regarded as wasteland becomes attractive to developers. As a result, once again the area, known to the Larrakia as Kulaluk, has become “something of a symbol”, as described by Mr Justice Woodward in 1974, confirming the relevance of a petition presented forty years ago.

Yours sincerely

Dr William B Day

Consulting anthropologist.

There is a vast amount of information available at www.drbilldayanthropologist.com