

# MONTHS IN REVIEW

## JANUARY / FEBRUARY

compiled by Zrinka Lemezina

### 06.01

- ☀ Domestic violence campaigner, Bess Price decided not to contest the Northern Territory seat of Lingiari at this year's federal election.

### 08.01

- ☀ Federal Environment Minister, Peter Garrett released the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park management plan today. Under the plan, the number of people climbing Uluru must drop from 38% to under 20% and it will be a 'couple of years at least' before the climb is banned.

### 12.01

- ☀ Federal Opposition Leader, Tony Abbott will launch a campaign to override the Queensland Government's *Wild Rivers Act 2005* as it denies Aboriginal people economic opportunities. He announced plans to introduce a private member's bill into Federal Parliament after obtaining legal advice suggesting that the Commonwealth can override the state law.

### 15.01

- ☀ The *UN State of the World's Indigenous Peoples* report was released today. The report highlights how Indigenous communities all over the world face daily issues of violence, continuing assimilation policies, marginalisation, forced removal or relocation, denial of land rights and many other abuses. It also reveals alarming statistics on poverty, health, education, employment, human rights and the environment. The report is available at <<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/sowip.html>>.

### 21.01

- ☀ NITV launched a children's television series *Yarramundi Kids* to educate children about the importance of family and friends, eating healthy food and caring for our environment. The program incorporates avatars, puppets, location stories, animation and Indigenous language segments in a fun and interactive way. The program will be screened on NITV on weekdays at 7.00am and 11.00 am EST from 15 February.
- ☀ The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare ('AIHW') says that Indigenous children continue to be over-represented in the child protection system. They are eight times more likely to be placed on a protection order than their non-Indigenous counterparts and are nine times more likely to be cared for by people outside their immediate family. The trend towards state care is growing, with the number of children on care and protection orders increasing to almost 35,500 since 2008, an increase of 8.5%. Federal Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Jenny Macklin described the statistics as 'horrific', saying that 'far, far too many families are abusing their children, neglecting their children'.

### 22.01

- ☀ Sydney's Tranby College, Australia's oldest Aboriginal education institution, has cancelled its literacy, numeracy and business courses and has had to turn away students enrolled in those classes. Teacher Anne Ndaba says that the college has had \$200,000 cut from its funding for the past four years, leaving it with nothing to pay teachers.
- ☀ Outgoing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Tom Calma released the sixth and final *Social Justice* and *Native Title* reports today. The Social Justice report focuses on justice reinvestment to reduce over-representation in the criminal courts, protection of Indigenous languages and sustaining traditional homeland communities. The *Native Title* report makes 27 recommendations for reform of the native title system, calling for a shift in the burden of proof, a more flexible approach to connection evidence, and promoting more flexible settlement packages. It also comprehensively reviews land tenure reform. Commissioner Calma urged governments to 'respect our voices, our rights, our lands, our resources and our waters. Only then will this country truly be able to retreat from injustice.'
- ☀ Speaking in Darwin, PM Kevin Rudd was unable to explain why the Federal Government's \$672 million Remote Indigenous Housing Program has still not delivered any new houses. PM Rudd said that 'building houses in Indigenous and remote Australia is a difficult undertaking' but that 'there are nearly 50 underway now and we will continue to implement the program'.

### 24.01

- ☀ A survey commissioned by the National Australia Day Council found that 90% of Australians want Indigenous people officially recognised as part of Australia Day celebrations. People aged between 18-34 were more likely to favour formal recognition.

### 26.01

- ☀ About 100 protesters gathered outside Old Parliament House, Canberra to call for greater recognition of Indigenous people. Isabelle Coe, an elder who helped establish the Aboriginal tent embassy in 1972, called on PM Rudd to come down and talk to the group on 'Sovereign Day'. Ms Coe said that 2010 marks 38 years since the tent embassy was established and that, in that time, 'we've been fighting for our rights and we're not going to change'.

### 29.01

- ☀ Federal Minister for Indigenous Health, Warren Snowdon today launched a national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers. Speaking at the Ceduna Koonibba Aboriginal Health Service, Mr Snowdon said that the Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander Health Workers Association will help build workforce capacity by bringing together Indigenous health workers and by providing them with a strong professional voice. The body will be governed by board members elected from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers across Australia through state and territory processes, with an inaugural AGM to be held in mid 2010. An interim board is currently operating, with an office in Canberra.

### 31.01

- ☀ Tom Calma today completed his term as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner. President of the Australian Human Rights Commission (‘AHRC’), Cathy Branson QC said that Mr Calma ‘has made outstanding contributions to human rights protections in Indigenous affairs and race relations during his five and a half years’. Ms Branson noted Mr Calma’s involvement in the development of the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples, his leadership in the Close the Gap campaign, his promotion of economic development through recognition of land tenure systems, his work in raising awareness about the impact of climate change on Indigenous people, his support for community-based solutions to family violence and child abuse, and his ongoing advocacy for members of the Stolen Generations.

### 11.02

- ☀ PM Kevin Rudd released the first *Closing the Gap* report card today, saying ‘some say little has happened in the year since the Apology, but that is not the case’ and that ‘since the end of 2007, 80 houses have been completed or are just nearing completion in remote Northern Territory communities’. The Opposition is critical of the report’s findings, saying that it does nothing to suggest that the Government has made any progress in reducing Indigenous disadvantage.

### 12.02

- ☀ AHRC President, Cathy Branson QC welcomed Mr Mick Gooda as the new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner. Commissioner Gooda, a descendant of the Gangulu people of Central Queensland, takes over from Tom Calma, who served in the role from 2004.

### 13.02

- ☀ Today is the two year anniversary of the National Apology to the Stolen Generations. Former Australian of the Year, Mick Dodson, used the opportunity to remind the Federal Government of the recommendations put forward in the *Bringing Them Home* report and argued that, ‘to make genuine progress, we need to rethink the fundamentals of public policy ... we have to revisit the core historic reasons and still extant philosophical dogmas behind Indigenous dispossession, marginalisation and poverty’. Mr Dodson advocated a ‘community-development rights-based approach that delivers on self determination and recognises meaningful land rights’ as ‘the way to achieve real economic, social and cultural development’.

### 15.02

- ☀ President of the Law Council of Australia, Glenn Ferguson today launched a national policy statement in Darwin, outlining a plan to encourage Indigenous Australians to study and practice law. Mr Ferguson says that the policy statement, developed by the Council’s Indigenous Legal Issues Committee, will require the legal community to work with Indigenous associations, Australian law schools, law

practices, state and territory law societies and bar associations to develop better pathways into legal practice.

### 17.02

- ☀ Ruby Hunter, an Aboriginal musician, member of the Stolen Generations and pioneer of reconciliation, died of a heart attack today. Ms Hunter was 54 years old. Close friend and long-term collaborator, Shane Howard said ‘Ruby was a great champion for Aboriginal women, for all women, for all families’ and that she and husband Archie Roach were ‘two people taken away from their families, but together they made an art of their devotion to each other and their family’.
- ☀ In its submission to the Senate Inquiry on Social Security and Other Legislation, the AHRC says that more needs to be done to make the NT Intervention fully compliant with human rights. The AHRC is urging governments to reinstate the *Racial Discrimination Act 1974* (Cth), together with all state/territory anti-discrimination legislation, by no later than 1 July 2010.

### 19.02

- ☀ NSW Minister for Lands, Tony Kelly today announced a compensation payment of \$6.1 million to the Dunghutti people for the acquisition of native title land in Crescent Head.
- ☀ WA police charged a 13-year-old Aboriginal girl from Marble Bar after she lost control of a stolen car during a high-speed chase along the Great Northern Highway. Police allege that the girl caused the death of a passenger, another 13-year-old girl, whose family is now seeking ‘payback’ against both the driver and the other three passengers.

### 23.02

- ☀ The Queensland Opposition indicated that it does not support preambular recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the State Constitution. Opposition Leader, John-Paul Langbroek called for a referendum, arguing that the Constitution (Preamble) Amendment Bill 2009 is ‘an elevated recognition of one ethnic group ... to the exclusion of all others’ and is a ‘superficial nod in the direction of political correctness’. On the other hand, Les Malezer, spokesman for the Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research Action, criticised the proposed preamble as ‘offensive’ and ‘completely wrong’ because ‘it’s not about acknowledging our rights, it’s actually about denying our rights and affirming that we have no rights.’

### 25.02

- ☀ The WA Government and the Yawuru people today signed Australia’s biggest native title agreement. The package, worth more than \$196 million, recognises traditional owners’ freehold title over 5298sq km in and around Broome. Covering a native title determination made by Federal Court Justice Ron Merkel in 2006, the deal provides for commercial, industrial and social development, and establishes significant coastal conservation reserves that will be managed jointly with Broome shire and the State Government.
- ☀ The National Drug Research Institute at Curtin University warned that suicide has taken on ‘martyrdom symbolism’ in some Aboriginal communities. Ted Wilkes of the Institute’s Aboriginal research team said that ‘there is an acute and chronic need for targeted programs that address the circumstances of Indigenous Australians.’