



# Northern Land Council

## MEDIA RELEASE

### NLC Mourns Helicopter Victims

7 June 2002

It is with deep sadness and regret that the Northern Land Council (NLC) extends its condolences to the families of the four men whose lives were tragically taken on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> June 2002.

Two of the deceased were outstanding representatives of the NLC over many years. Their loss has been felt deeply.

“Tragedies such as this have a tendency to galvanise people,” NLC Chief Executive Officer Norman Fry said today.

“Because of the nature of our work staff establish very strong bonds. The NLC enjoys a family atmosphere as much as it fosters an office environment, and to lose two well-respected and long-standing representatives in such horrific circumstances has really hit home. Our hearts go out to the families of those men who lost their lives in this tragic incident.”

Mr Yilarama was a senior traditional owner and former council member, and was engaged to identify and protect sacred sites on the pipeline project.

“He was a highly respected Traditional Owner,” Mr Fry said. “His association with the NLC extends over a lengthy period of time and our deepest sympathies are with his family.”

Also killed in the crash was Chris Uren. He had recently returned to work for the Land Council after a two-year period with the national Native Title Tribunal.

“Myself along with his senior colleagues were looking forward to a long-term future working relationship with Chris. He had great professional and personal attributes and was much loved and respected by staff and our constituents, who all valued his polite and friendly manner,” Mr Fry said.

“Our hearts go out to his wife Amanda and children Kathleen and Nathan. We will do whatever we can to assist them during this very difficult time.”

The passing of pilot Adrian Wagg has also been met with a deep sense of loss.

“I have flown with Adrian several times myself,” Mr Fry said. “He was an experienced professional who never took risks, knew the country and was an individual who enjoyed his work immensely.”

“Adrian and his family were well known to many NLC staff and members. As a well-liked and long-standing member of the Nhulunbuy community, Adrian will not be forgotten.”

Prior to the tragedy, a cooperative relationship was being formed with the proposed pipeline developer, the Perth-based Epic Energy – largely built on John Girle’s efforts. He had established a strong partnership with NLC staff.

“John’s tragic death brings great sadness to us all. We extend our condolences to his family,” Mr Fry said.

Mr Fry said his thoughts and those of staff were also with the sole survivor – Robert Graham.

“Robert has a very long association with the NLC and Central Land Council. Staff and constituents of both Land Councils know his integrity and dedication to his work,” Mr Fry said. “To survive such a horrific incident in the manner in which he has is a testimony to his strength and endurance.”

“We wish him and his family well in his recovery.”

“It is tragedies such as these which make us confront the difficulties and dangers we encounter as personnel working in this area.”

“However, the overwhelming expression of support and sympathy reinforces the great strength of our organisation and community, and will help us to continue.”