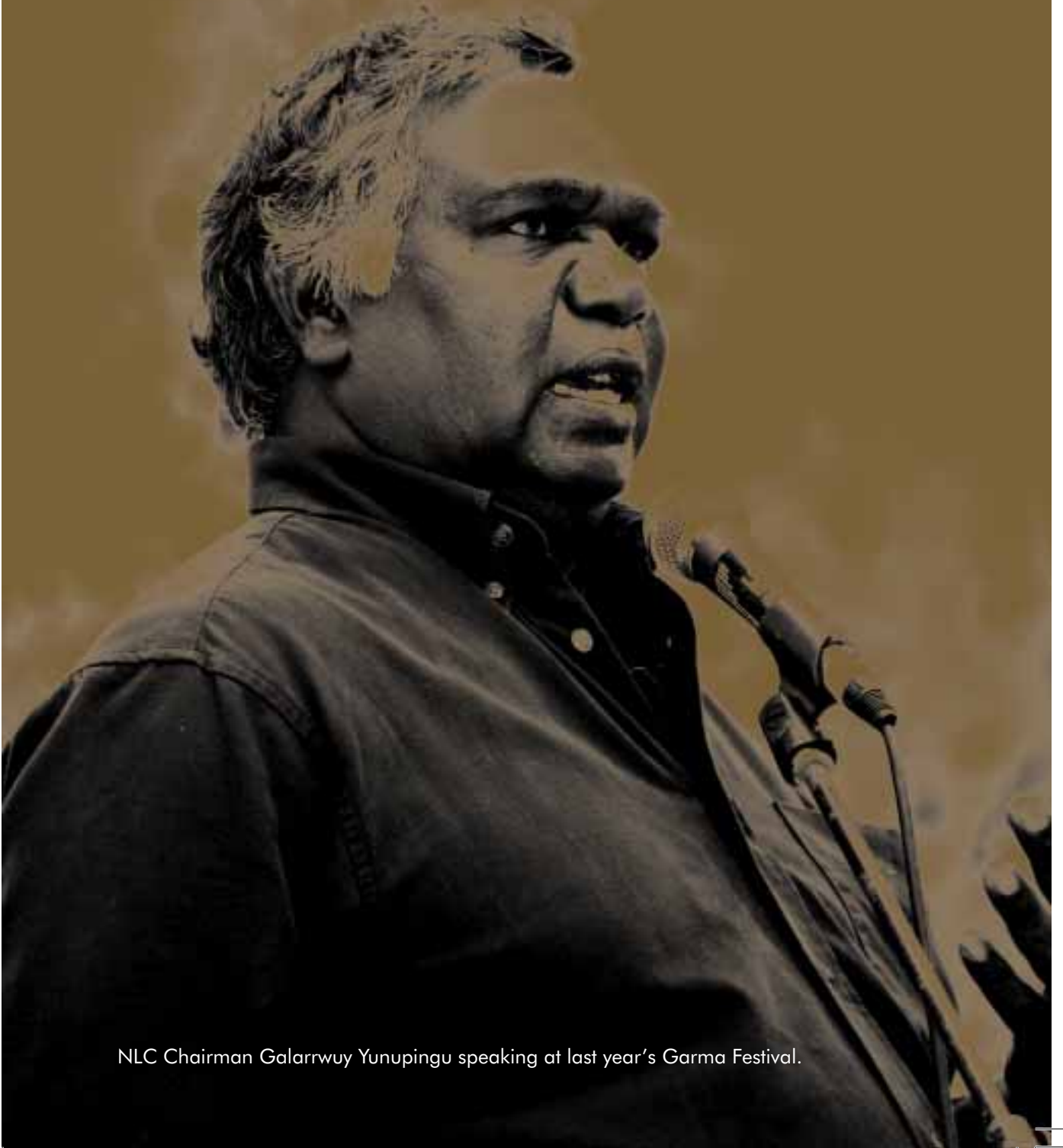


## >> OVERVIEW



NLC Chairman Galarrwuy Yunupingu speaking at last year's Garma Festival.

## >>OVERVIEW

### >>CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

**F**or more than 24 years I have been honoured and proud to occupy the position of Chairman of the Northern Land Council.

But now I wish to pursue other opportunities in life, and from October this year I will resign as Chairman of an organisation that I believe has helped to shape the Northern Territory and Australian landscape for the betterment of Aboriginal people.

Land councils have delivered land rights, and the protection of those rights through a strong voice. Land Councils have given us control over what happens on our land. Today, almost 50 per cent of the NT's land mass and 80 per cent of the coastline has been returned to traditional owners. This is a significant achievement of land rights.

But there are many challenges ahead. With the NT now standing on the threshold of an era of major development, Aboriginal people must be allowed to take the next step and participate fully in the economic opportunities. Aboriginal participation in the economic future of the NT should be embraced by all levels of government.

The NLC is heavily involved in the pursuit of this future, and has actively involved Aboriginal people in a variety of negotiations. There are a number of major mining and infrastructure projects either scheduled to commence, or already under way in the NT, including the Wadeye to Gove gas pipeline. These projects will all involve forming partnerships with traditional owners. Involvement of Aboriginal people in these projects will assist in the process of regional development, expand community wealth, and create employment opportunities. The Australian economy can only benefit as a result.

Today, there are many vibrant and dynamic community enterprises and developments. Through the work of the Caring for Country



*Galarrwuy Yunupingu*

Unit, the NLC has facilitated community based land management programs and created over 300 jobs for rangers across the Top End. The NLC is also at the cutting edge in regard to employment placement programs. A program that the NLC developed in partnership with the Territory Construction Association has resulted in Aboriginal people sharing in the economic benefits of major projects.

The Territory is the ideal place for new approaches to be trialled, because here there has been the extraordinary benefit of nearly 30 years of recognition of Aboriginal law through the *Land Rights Act*. As I see it, the time is right to work towards an economic future that embraces Aboriginal people as full and equal partners.

However, this economic future can only be built on political, legal and constitutional structures that recognise the unique culture and law of Aboriginal Territorians. It is only by laying these new institutional foundations today, in consultation with Aboriginal people, that can be ensured an equal place at the table for generations into the future.

Finally, I want to acknowledge my fellow Land Council members. There are many great men and women who work hard to ensure the voice of their people is heard.

I would also like to acknowledge the staff of the Land Council for their hard work over the many years I have been Chairman.



## >> CEO'S REPORT

Over the past year, the NLC has worked hard to ensure that the potential economic benefits for Aboriginal people, arising from a number of projects in the NLC region, will be maximised.

One of these projects that is of national importance is the proposed trans-Territory gas pipeline between Wadeye in the west and Gove in the east. The NLC was actively engaged in negotiations with ALCAN and Woodside over Aboriginal participation in the project, including the option of taking an equity position in the pipeline.

An important step was taken towards the development of a manganese mine near Bootu Creek. Agreement was reached between traditional owners and the miner over a road corridor from the mine site to the Alice Springs to Darwin railway line. This important project is an example of the new developments taking place in the NLC region, which have become viable since the establishment of the railway. The project will result in significant economic benefits to the traditional owners, both in terms of income and employment.

A landmark Indigenous Land Use Agreement was signed over the Bradshaw Station defence facility. This agreement not only ensures that the native title interests of traditional owners are recognised, but makes provision for the participation of Aboriginal people in the many economic opportunities, such as major construction contracts, that will arise from the development of the defence facility.

The Larrakia Development Corporation continued its success story by making major in-roads into the development and construction sector, with the Palmerston subdivision of Darla now entering its third phase of development.

An essential component to the success of projects like these, has been the NLC's



Norman Fry

Employment and Development Unit. A small but dedicated team, the unit continues to create training and employment opportunities for Aboriginal people. Its efforts were recognised during the year, when the NLC (together with its business partner the Territory Construction Association) was awarded a Prime Minister's Award for Excellence in Community Business Partnerships.

The NLC also continued to facilitate successful small-scale economic development on Aboriginal land through the Caring for Country Unit. I am particularly encouraged by the growth of Aboriginal rangers and ranger groups. These groups are developing innovative approaches to the sustainable management of country, achieving significant cultural, economic and environmental outcomes.

Extensive negotiations took place over the lease-back and joint management of NT parks and reserves under the *Parks and Reserves (Framework for the Future) Act 2003*. Preliminary agreement to the terms of the deal was achieved by 30 June. Final agreement on the deal is required by 31 December 2004.

During the year, the NLC made further progress towards the implementation of the recommendations of the ANAO's performance audit of the NT Land Councils, including adopting a service charter, and



## >>OVERVIEW continued...

developing a new outcomes and outputs reporting framework. This new framework is reflected in this annual report.

The three-year term of the current Full Council of the NLC expires in the next few months. I would like to thank the Chairman and Full Council for their leadership and support over the past three years. I look forward to working with the new Council, and to pursuing the many challenges involved in achieving economic development on Aboriginal land in the 21st century.

After more than 20 years as Chairman of the NLC, Galarrwuy Yunupingu has announced his retirement. I would like to take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation for the contribution he has made to the work of the NLC over many years. I am honoured to have worked alongside a man who is regarded by many as one of the founding-fathers of land rights, and a national living treasure.

Galarrwuy began his land rights campaign in the early 1960s with his father Mungurrawuy, who, as a Gumatj Clan elder, was one of the Yolngu leaders who fought and lost the battle to stop a bauxite mine operating on his land.

Over his 24-year period as Chairman, Galarrwuy has overseen the work of the NLC to win back land for Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory, and has championed initiatives to help traditional owners assert their rights to manage and control their land and marine resources.



*NLC CEO Norman Fry at the launch of a joint mining booklet.*



*NLC Chairman Galarrwuy Yunupingu.*



