

Media Statement

Klynton Wanganeen
Khatija Thomas
Commissioners for Aboriginal Engagement

Friday 3 June 2011

Kunmanara Tur

Commissioners for Aboriginal Engagement Klynton Wanganeen and Khatija Thomas will join Aboriginal communities tomorrow to farewell Aboriginal elder Kunmanara Tur.

Mrs Tur was born in 1936 at Hamilton Bore, about 100kms from Oodnadatta, north-west South Australia. She spent her early years in a bush camp with her mother, the late Mary Inawantji Carroll, a Yankunytjatjara woman and her father, the late John Edward (Jack) Kennedy an Irish man.

At the age of 7 Mrs Tur's family relocated to the township of Oodnadatta where she entered Oodnadatta Mission to begin school.

At the age of fourteen she was sent to the Bagshaw family in McLaren Flat, Adelaide to work as a domestic where she helped raised their three boys.

Throughout this time Mrs Tur continued to see her mother and her little sister, Gloria, and was still able to speak her mother tongue, Antikirinya-Yankunytjatjara fluently. This skill would lead to a life long career as a translator and interpreter.

In 1973 Mrs Tur began teaching Pitjantjatjara at the Summer School of the University of Adelaide and began interpreting for the Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement. This was the beginning of a career that spanned almost 40 years as an interpreter for Anangu people where she was employed with the Ethnic Affairs Commission and as a court interpreter on the North West circuit.

Mrs Tur was given Eldership status at the age of 46 from the Antikirinya-Yankunytjatjara community northwest of South Australia in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara lands (APY lands).

She has been a tireless advocate and cultural broker for the Anangu community in relation to land rights, health provision, and maintenance of Anangu languages and as an interpreter. Mrs Tur was given permission and selected by Pitjantjatjara Elders to teach and interpret Pitjantjatjara (as this is not her mother tongue) in courts, prisons, hospitals, for Native Title claims and as a lecturer with the University of South Australia.

Mrs Tur was the first Aboriginal Artist in Residence with Carclew Youth Performing Arts Centre, performing in numerous schools teaching children about Anangu culture, storytelling, song and dance.

In April 2011 Mrs Tur was awarded the Flinders University Honorary Degree of Letters, *honoris causa* for her lifelong contribution as a cultural education, oral linguist, interpreter and advocate for Indigenous rights.

She has also written an autobiography *Cicada Dreaming*.

Commissioner Wanganeen said Mrs Tur has spent her entire life helping others and is very highly regarded both in the community and non Aboriginal community.

“She was a born teacher and from a very early age she began helping others,” said Mr Wanganeen

Commissioner Thomas said Mrs Tur was an inspiration to many in the community as a women who lived and survived through the many challenges faced by our people of her generation.

“As a pioneer in teaching, translation and interpretation, her volunteered generosity of spirit and time in sharing her cultural knowledge will be sadly missed,” said Ms Thomas.

The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Hon Grace Portolesi said Mrs Tur touched many people's lives and was a catalyst for people who sought to retain or regain their Aboriginal language and for those of us who wished to learn an Aboriginal language.

“She worked tirelessly to ensure Aboriginal knowledge and language was accessible to people, learning institutions and Government. She will be sadly missed. Kunmanara Tur remains an inspiration to many of us, non-Aboriginal people and Aboriginal people alike,” said the Minister.

Mrs Tur's Funeral will be held at St. Margaret Mary's Catholic Church, 286 Torrens Road, Croydon Park, on Saturday, June 4 2011. The Mass will commence at 11.00am.

Media Contact
Sally Kaleta
0413 159 674