

Media Statement

Klynton Wanganeen
Khatija Thomas
Commissioners for Aboriginal Engagement

24 August 2011

Passing of Aboriginal Elder Matthew Rigney

Commissioners for Aboriginal Engagement, Klynton Wanganeen and Khatija Thomas, will join Aboriginal communities on Friday to farewell Aboriginal elder and Chair of the Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority Inc, Matthew Rigney.

Mr Rigney, who was raised at Raukkan (formerly Point McLeay mission), passed away on Thursday 18 August in Meningie, on the shores of Lake Albert, South Australia.

After completing a Degree in Social Sciences from the South Australian Institute of Technology and a Management Certificate at the Australian Institute of Management, Mr Rigney had a varied professional career. He worked in Aboriginal Community Welfare, Education, Youth Affairs, Sport, Employment and Training, Natural Resource Management, Community Development and Native Title. For over a decade he worked at Camp Coorong: Race Relations and Cultural Education Centre as a cultural and political educator.

Commissioner, Klynton Wanganeen said the passing of Mr Rigney was a huge loss to the Aboriginal community.

“Mr Rigney took up every opportunity to fight for the rights of Aboriginal people. He was a true leader and was heavily involved in numerous advocacy groups,” said Mr Wanganeen.

His passion for politics and the rights of the Aboriginal community saw him Chair the Patpa Warra Yunti Regional Council of the Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Commission. He was also a member of the Ngarrindjeri nation leadership group who meet directly with State and Federal Ministers to advocate for rights, justice, fairness and equality for Ngarrindjeri and Aboriginal people in general.

“He will be greatly missed for his membership on numerous committees and his enormous contribution to Indigenous affairs locally, nationally and internationally,” said Mr Wanganeen.

He was Chairman of Ngarrindjeri Native Title Management Committee, Member of the Tendi – Ngarrindjeri Governing Body and Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations Representative on The Living Murray’s Community Reference Group.

In recent years he has been a tireless advocate for Indigenous rights to water.

Commissioner Khatija Thomas said Mr Rigney also had artistic flair.

“He designed the famous Ngarrindjeri Flag, which was flown for the first time on Kumarangk (Hindmarsh Island) in 1999,” said Ms Thomas.

“His charismatic leadership style, sense of humour and unwavering commitment to the rights of our people made him an inspiration and role model to myself and many generations,” said Ms Thomas.

Mr Rigney also coached Raukkan to a number of championships in the Aboriginal football carnivals during the 80's and 90's.

Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Hon Grace Portolesi MP, said that Mr Rigney was an important leader in the Ngarrindjeri community who held strong values about Aboriginal culture and heritage.

“He worked tirelessly towards protecting the Coorong in particular, and sharing cultural knowledge with others to help improve land management practices in this fragile eco-environment. Mr Rigney will be sadly missed,” said the Minister.

The funeral service will be held at Centennial Park on Friday 26th August 2011 at 1.30pm.

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