

Wukidi ceremony for Dhakiyarr Wirrpanda

On Saturday 29 June, a Wukidi ceremony was held for Dhakiyarr Wirrpanda at the Darwin Supreme Court.

This historical act of reconciliation was attended by Chief Justice of Australia Murray Gleeson, Chief Justice of the Northern Territory Brian Martin, Solicitor General, Tom Pauling QC, and a healthy contingent of the local legal profession and the general public.

The first part of the ceremony took place in Liberty Square, outside the Supreme Court, and involved traditional dancing, singing and music.

The ceremony was then taken inside the Supreme Court for the ceremonial installation of the Larrakitj poles (mortuary poles).

The aim of the Wukidi ceremony was to lay the spirit of Dhakiyarr to rest. The ceremony stems from Garrawan (Woodah Island) in north east Arnhem Land.

The idea was conceived and driven by the Yolngu people, but NT Solicitor-General Tom Pauling QC acted as the Program Co-ordinator for the event.

"This is undoubtedly the most powerful act of reconciliation in Australia ever," Mr Pauling said.

In October last year, Dhakiyarr's

descendants (the Yolngu people) made a proposal to Chief Minister Clare Martin that a Wukidi ceremony be held in Darwin and that Larrakitj poles be erected as a permanent memorial.

In the letter the Yolngu described the importance of the Wukidi ceremony.

"We believe that he [Dhakiyarr] was shot and his bones are left in Darwin Harbour. To us Yolngu people, these bones are very important to our ritual because the bones have grown from the land and contain the strength of the land. Because these bones are in Darwin, it leaves us feeling empty without the strength they contain."

"This is undoubtedly the most powerful act of reconciliation in Australia ever."

"We know that bones are also important in your culture and you will understand. We remember that when Constable McColl was killed at Woodah Island that his bones were later collected and taken back to Darwin where they had a big funeral for him. This never happened for our leader and all we have left of him is a photograph."

"This ceremony will be an act of reconciliation between the Northern Territory Government and us, the family of Dhakiyarr Wirrpanda. We would like the site of the Wukidi to be a permanent memorial to our leader and a



A member of the McColl family spoke at the ceremony.

monument for our children, and their children also, to remind them that this was the last ground our leader stood upon."

The Larrakitj poles were prepared and painted by the foremost artists in the region and hold great spiritual significance to the Yolngu.

The cover photo is of the ceremonial installation of Larrakitj poles in the Supreme Court.

Chief Justice Murray Gleeson attended the ceremony on behalf of the High Court, to accept thanks from Dhakiyarr's family.

In the spirit of reconciliation, 35 members of Constable McColl's family also attended the ceremony and received an apology from Dhakiyarr's family.

After the ceremony, some of the McColl family went to stay with the Yolngu in north east Arnhem Land.



Dgambawa Maramulli, a representative of the Yolngu, explains the ceremonial proceedings.



Yolngu dancing as part of the Wukidi ceremony



History of Dhakiyarr Wirranda

Dhakiyarr Wirranda was a senior ceremony man for the Yolngu people, from Blue Mud Bay in north east Arnhem Land.

In the early 1930s he speared Constable Albert McColl to death in controversial circumstances.

Dhakiyarr came to Darwin to tell his side of the story and was subsequently arrested and tried for murder.

Tried in the Northern Territory

Supreme Court, a jury found Dhakiyarr guilty and he was sentenced to death.

In 1934, Dhakiyarr successfully appealed to the High Court and had his conviction quashed (*Tuckiar V The King* (1934) 52 CLR 335).

The Administrator of the Northern Territory was told to ensure that Dhakiyarr had a safe passage home, but after his release he never made it home and was last seen alive in Darwin.



Dgambawa Maramulli, Justice Trevor Riley, Chief Minister Clare Martin, Chief Justice Brian Martin, Wuyal Wirranda and Chief Justice Murray Gleeson, outside the Supreme Court.