



Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara

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Media Release: Celebrating Five Decades of Land Rights: KULILAYA Festival Lights Up the APY Lands

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In a spectacular display of culture and community spirit, the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands hosted the Kulilaya Festival over the weekend, marking the 50th anniversary of Freehold Title to the region in the remote north-west of South Australia.

Drawing nearly half of the local population from across the vast 105,000 square kilometres of the APY Lands, the festival featured an impressive line-up of traditional and contemporary music and dance, showcasing the extraordinary talents of indigenous artists.

Highlights included performances by the Iwiri Choir, building on the traditions of the globally renowned Ernabella Choir, alongside the rare and meaningful inma dance and song, a profound expression of the deep knowledge of country and culture.

The festival was a celebration for all ages, featuring a diverse array of bands noted for their innate musicianship. Seven of the finest groups, including the emerging international sensation Dem Mob, entertained an enthusiastic crowd on Sunday, creating a vibrant atmosphere that lasted well into the night.

The day was also marked by significant milestones, including the 30th anniversary of the internationally acclaimed digital archive Ara Iritija and the launch of the Inkamala Songbook by Iwiri Corporation, aimed at introducing children to music-making in their own language. A collaborative performance with the choir was a highlight, engaging the youngest attendees in the celebration.

Various organisations took the opportunity to showcase their contributions to the APY Lands, from Warru (rock wallaby) conservation efforts to artistic endeavours.

The festival honoured the enduring legacy of the Elders and the Land Rights Campaign of the 1970s, which culminated in the achievement of Freehold Title in November 1981, a historic handback completed by Premier David Tonkin, following the initiatives of his predecessor, Don Dunstan. Esteemed speakers, including Owen Burton (Deputy Chair of the APY Executive Board), Donald Fraser, and Trevor Adamson, paid tribute to these efforts, with special homage to the late Land Rights Leader Punch Kawaki Thompson, remembered by his daughter, Melissa Thompson.

Distinguished guests, including South Australia's Deputy Premier Susan Close, Attorney-General and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Kyam Maher, and Federal Member for Grey Rowan Ramsey, along with other state and federal representatives, were in attendance, underscoring the significance of the event.

The organisers expressed their gratitude for the overwhelming participation and enthusiasm, which made the Kulilaya Festival a memorable and joyful family event, celebrating the rich heritage and vibrant future of the APY Lands.

"This weekend, we celebrated not just a milestone in our history but the vibrant heartbeat of our community. Witnessing nearly half of our population gather with such joy and unity was a powerful reminder of the strength and resilience that has guided us through decades," said APY General Manager Richard King.

“I extend my deepest gratitude to everyone who played a part in making this celebration a landmark event, including our sponsors and guests who flew in from around the country, and for our dedicated organisers.

“Together, we've created a moment that will be etched in our memories as we look forward to continuing to foster unity, pride, and progress on the APY Lands.”

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