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PEOPLE IN NEW SOUTH WALES THROUGH
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INDEPENDENCE

media release

NEW SOUTH WALES ABORIGINAL LAND COUNCIL

Statement by Chairperson Bev Manton

29 January 2010

Aunty Gwen Russell – a life of passion, dignity and profound decency

The Worimi Nation and the Port Stephens area have lost one of its true stateswomen, with the sad passing of Aunty Gwen Russell earlier this week.

Like so many others, Aunty Gwen was a great inspiration to me. She has had a significant influence on my life and for that I will forever be grateful.

Although only slight in stature, Aunty Gwen's tenacity and unrelenting fight for justice for her people certainly made her a formidable force to be reckoned with in all areas of the political and non-political spectrums.

She personified, in every sense of the word, the term 'elder'.

It is a true measure of the person that she rose from humble beginnings to become a great and respected leader.

Although Aunty Gwen experienced almost every aspect of human adversity and deprivation of social justice, she never allowed these hurdles to negatively influence her efforts and her pursuit to reconcile the many differences between Aboriginal and non Aboriginal Australians.

A founding member of the Worimi Local Aboriginal Land Council, Aunty Gwen was an active member of the Aboriginal community for over 30 years, and also became a member of the Worimi Conservation Lands. Aunty Gwen rarely missed meetings and it was only recently she became too ill to attend her beloved LALC meetings.

Her lifetime of dedication to her people will not be forgotten. People of the calibre of Aunty Gwen are irreplaceable. She spent her life committed to the struggle.

She was committed to reconciliation in a very practical way – she believed in meeting with people face to face, talking through the issues and building solid relationships. Her approach was personal and hands-on, and people will remember for her for that.

Aunty Gwen epitomised in every possible way, the attributes and qualities of a decent, dignified and humble Aboriginal woman.

I am privileged to have known her. She will be sadly missed.

Ends.