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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INDEPENDENCE

# media release

NEW SOUTH WALES ABORIGINAL LAND COUNCIL

## Museum to return sacred carved tree to land council

*25 June, 2009*

A sacred carved tree that marked the late 19<sup>th</sup> century burial site of five Gamilaroi men will be returned, after a lengthy campaign by the Baradine Local Aboriginal Land Council from the Museum Victoria, the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council's representative for the North West Region, Steve Gordon, announced today.

"This is a magnificent achievement by the Baradine Land Council," Councillor Gordon said.

"I know the whole community of Baradine are rejoicing that the tree is finally to be returned to its proper resting place".

Councillor Gordon said the history of how the tree was removed and its subsequent history was an amazing story.

Baradine Land Council CEO Lorraine Ransfield said for once the history of the tree's removal had been well documented.

"It was cut down by rangers of the NSW Forestry Commission in 1918 and then reduced in size and sent to the Australia Museum in Sydney. It had marked the 1868 burial site of five Gamilaroi men.

"The general location of the burial site is known," Mrs Ransfield said.

The campaign to have the tree repatriated to Baradine, the Land Council responsible for the region where the tree was known to have been located, had begun in earnest over two years ago.

"The person who co-ordinated the campaign, fully supported by the Land Council, was Land Council member, Merv Sutherland, who works for the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change (DECC's) Cultural Heritage Division.

“Merv has worked very hard to make sure the tree was returned.”

Mrs Ransfield said what remained was the actual carved section of the original cypress tree which was 150 centimetres long and 46 centimetres in diameter.

“Because its history is well documented we know that it was sent to the Australia Museum in Sydney in 1918 and for three years was part of their artefacts collection. However, in 1921, as part of exchange program of artefacts, it was transferred to the Museum of Victoria - now known as Museum Victoria.

“The Museum was particularly helpful and its Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee had fully endorsed and supported its return. They will also be helping us to identify any living relatives of the five men whose burial site was marked by this sacred tree.

“The names of the five men are known,” Mrs Ransfield said.

Land Council Chairperson, Mr Ron (Sonny) Magann had commented in correspondence to Museum Victoria: “The tree has strong historical and sacred significance to the Aboriginal people in this area who form part of the Gamilaroi Aboriginal Nation.

“It’s return is of great significance”.

Mrs Ransfield said the Land Council would set aside a special Keeping Place to house the sacred tree.

“While we don’t yet have a definite date for its return we think it will be in the next few months,” Mrs Ransfield said.

“The Land Council plans to hold a major ceremony for the whole community”.

Councillor Gordon said its return was an event of enormous significance.

“It is part of our healing. That it is finally coming home is cause for great joy and celebration”.

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