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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INDEPENDENCE

media release

NEW SOUTH WALES ABORIGINAL LAND COUNCIL

The Fox – a truly remarkable Australian

Monday, March 22, 2010

The sudden death of Aboriginal activist Charles (Chicka) Dixon is a terrible loss to the Australian and Aboriginal community said New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council Chairperson, Bev Manton today.

"While I was aware he had been ill for some time, I was nevertheless deeply upset by the news that he had passed away," Cr Manton said.

"Chicka was originally from Wallaga Lake and Wreck Bay reserves on the South Coast and was one of the most influential figures in contemporary Aboriginal Australia.

"He dedicated his life to fighting for basic human rights and justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

"Born in 1928, Chicka who was also known as the Fox, was educated in the school of hard knocks and he certainly came up the hard way.

"He attended his first political meeting in 1946 where he was inspired by the late Jack Patten, an organiser of the 1938 Day of Mourning and the Aborigines Progressive Association.

"He has been politically active ever since.

"A reformed drinker, he worked in the trade union movement and the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs with Charles Perkins in the late 1960s.

"It was during his time as a waterside worker that Chicka learnt about lobbying and how to successfully negotiate. In 1963 he joined Waterside Workers Union in Sydney and started lobbying the Union to become involved in Aboriginal Affairs.

"During the 1967 Referendum he campaigned alongside Pearl Gibbs and Faith Bandler.

"He was at the forefront of the legendary 1972 Aboriginal Embassy demonstrations with Michael Anderson, Gary Foley, Paul Coe and Billy Craigie.

“In 1972 he led a delegation of Aboriginal Australians invited to visit China to tell the Chinese about the Aboriginal struggle for justice while at the same time shaming the federal government.

“Chicka Dixon became a foundation member of the Aboriginal Arts Board in 1973 and later became its Chairman.

He was the first Aboriginal person to be appointed as a Councillor on the Australia Council.

He was also instrumental in establishing some of the earliest programs to help and lift the spirits of Aboriginal people incarcerated in NSW jails.

“In 1983 Chicka was named the first Aboriginal of the Year and was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Letters for his eminent service to the community by the University of New South Wales. He was passionate about education and I know he was proud of NSWALC for the funding and creation of our \$30 million Educational Endowment Fund.

“He was always a man of great compassion and generosity.

“In recent years, he donated all of his papers and documents on so many memorable moments in Aboriginal contemporary history to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) in Canberra.

“He did that so that they would not be lost to future generations of Aboriginal people.

“The Chicka Dixon story is the story of one of Australia's gutsiest fighters for human rights.

“I will always remember him, when reminiscing about his life, saying that he would go to his grave not dwelling on campaign losses but instead remembering some of the positive outcomes that he had helped achieved.

“He will be remembered for so many life-changing achievements.

“Chicka was, and remains, a great inspiration to younger generations of Aboriginal activists.

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