



CLC mourns the passing of Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue

The Central Land Council is mourning the passing of Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue AC CBE DSG, who died peacefully on February 4 2024, at 91. She was a proud Yankunytjatjara woman who devoted her life to advocating for and improving the health and well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Dr O'Donoghue played a crucial role in drafting an agreement that laid the foundation for the Native Title Act and worked out the implications of the High Court's Mabo decision.

According to former CLC Director David Ross, who led what is now the Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation at the time, Dr O'Donoghue was known for her directness when dealing with then Prime Minister Paul Keating. She understood that the High Court had opened a door that could quickly close. Dr O'Donoghue saw an opportunity to create Native Title laws that would change Australia, and she seized it.

"Dr O'Donoghue was a tenacious leader who opened many doors for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and we owe her a debt of gratitude because without her we wouldn't have Native Title," said Les Turner, CEO of the Central Land Council.

Born in remote South Australia, Dr O'Donoghue was a child of the stolen generation and was taken from her mother at just two years old. It would take 33 years for her to reunite with her mother Lily. She was raised in a children's home and received training as a domestic worker. Her first achievement in a life dedicated to fighting for justice for Indigenous people was becoming the first Aboriginal nurse in South Australia.

Dr O'Donoghue accomplished many remarkable feats throughout her career. She was the founding chairperson for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, the first Aboriginal to address the United Nations General Assembly, and the first Aboriginal woman appointed as a Member of the Order of Australia.

The Central Land Council extends its deepest condolences to Dr O'Donoghue's family and friends.

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