

Elder in fight for 'cultural survival'

By RUDI MAXWELL and DARREN COYNE



ALYEWARRE Elder Rosalie Kunoth-Monks is fighting for her cultural survival.

Ms Kunoth Monks believes the Abbott Government's pledge to negotiate with traditional owners in the Northern Territory for 99-year leases on their land is a slap in the face and a huge step backwards for Aboriginal land rights.

"I think every First Nations person should be concerned when we've fought so hard for land rights and now they're going to be taken back," she told the *Koori Mail*.

"These leases would take out four generations of black people being able to make any authoritative comments on what should happen on their land. It's like land being leased to the landlord rather than a landlord leasing to a business partner.

"It is so insidious, no Australian, black or white, should allow it."

Ms Kunoth-Monks said the plan to lock up Aboriginal land for 99 years should be fought at every turn.

"It is almost the 'final solution' of the First Nations people on this land," she said.

"Why are we so surprised?"

"We've been dehumanised in the Northern Territory under the Intervention, which continues on now for another 10 years under the guise of Stronger Futures.

"If people haven't woken up to

the fact that this is a real assault and a period of chaos being created, if we haven't woken up to all those messages in the NT, then we're asleep and in that sleep is death, the death of a beautiful culture as our tribal lands are slowly eaten away."

Indigenous Affairs Minister Nigel Scullion told the *Koori Mail* the Aboriginal people who had been involved in negotiations for 99-year leases know that it was 'entirely in their hands', adding that negotiations were being dealt with in the respectful and proper way.

"I haven't had the opportunity to talk with Rosalie, but I do understand that a Central Desert woman telling other traditional owners how they use their land is not very well mannered," he said.

Assimilate

Ms Kunoth-Monks said it seemed like the Federal Government's only policy was to assimilate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people into the mainstream.

"I believe they are so wrong," she said. "I am an Elder Alyewarre person and I will die as such.

"I am not mainstream Australian.

"I want each and every nation of the First Nations people to really think about where they are heading, where we are going. I want them to walk hand in hand and talk heart to heart, with ourselves first, then embrace those who are sympathetic, then together we can work to see some human rights in Australia."



Professor Shane Houston and Marion Scrymgour at the University of Sydney.

Honorary doctorate for health champion



THE news of an eight-year-old girl committing suicide was a turning point in Marion Scrymgour's political career,

sending her on a path to tackle some of the biggest health issues facing Indigenous people in Australia.

"That death was really confronting," Ms Scrymgour said. "It was the first time as a politician I felt impotent. I knew then I had to go back to working directly with people in health."

Her unwavering commitment to improving Indigenous health has just seen the pioneer in politics and policy awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Sydney.

Deputy vice chancellor (Indigenous strategy and services) Professor Shane Houston nominated Ms Scrymgour to receive the Doctor of Health Science.

"Marion Scrymgour has bought the same integrity, passion and commitment to

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health as she did to being the first Indigenous woman elected to the Northern Territory Parliament, as well as being appointed Australia's first Indigenous female cabinet minister," Prof Houston said.

"She was central to the development of new health services in the NT, one where Aboriginal organisations care for entire populations – Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike – in an area roughly 70 per cent the size of Victoria."

Think deeply

Prof Houston described Ms Scrymgour as someone who was willing to speak out on important matters and always prepared to challenge others to think deeply about complex issues.

Ms Scrymgour, who is CEO of the NT-based Wurlinjang Health Service, said she was humbled by the University of Sydney honour and hoped it would inspire young people who might think such an

achievement is unattainable. She doesn't balk at the challenges still being faced by champions of Indigenous health care.

"The resources are there but we've got to be smarter in how we use them," she said.

"We've got to sit down and make some very hard decisions.

"Everything to do with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health is a priority and we're not going to solve it all. But far too many people are dying from preventable diseases caused by lifestyle: smoking, alcohol and diet.

"Mental health, particularly suicide prevention, is a great personal concern.

"My hope for the future is a healthy and safe population – that our children are safe and healthy and accessing good education services."

● If you need immediate aid, call Lifeline on 13 11 14, Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467, Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800 or MensLine Australia on 1300 78 99 78.