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For further information contact  
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General Inquiries: Lolita Wikander Primary Health Care: Rachael Cross  
Aged & Disability Care: Robyn Pedler Health Promotion: Loyla Leysley  
Social and Emotional Wellbeing: Graham Jacobs  
or email: lolita.wikander@batchelor.edu.au

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To enrol, contact:

Jeanie Bell, freecall: 1800 636 071 email: jeanie.bell@batchelor.edu.au  
Michaela Wilkes, freecall: 1800 009 944 email: michaela.wilkes@batchelor.edu.au

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**Aboriginal Heritage – HW9  
Muswellbrook Bypass**

The Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW (RTA) proposes to provide a bypass of Muswellbrook town centre on the New England Highway.

The RTA seeks the registration of Aboriginal groups and/or Aboriginal people who wish to be consulted on Aboriginal cultural heritage matters relating to the proposed Muswellbrook Bypass.

Registrations from Aboriginal groups and/or Aboriginal people wishing to be consulted must be received by phone or in writing by 24 December 2007.

To register your interest, please contact:  
Matthew Mate, RTA Project Manager  
Locked Bag 30, NEWCASTLE NSW 2300  
Phone 02 4924 0646  
Facsimile 02 4924 0342  
Email matthew\_mate@rt.nsw.gov.au.

# Scrymgour the key to success

By CLAIRE SMITH

The appointment of Marion Scrymgour as the first Indigenous politician to hold the position of Deputy Leader of a State or Territory government may be perceived by some as a test of Kevin Rudd's election-night promise to break down divisions between State and Federal governments, but it also has the more likely potential for unprecedented success in Indigenous policy outcomes. Scrymgour has strongly opposed the Federal intervention in the Northern Territory in its current form while Rudd broadly endorses it, albeit with critical amendments. While the scene could have been set for potential conflict, there is now the possibility of a new period of constructive engagement between States/Territories and the Federal Government.

In October Scrymgour used the 2007 Charles Perkins Oration at Sydney University to blast the motivation and implementation of the intervention, characterising it as a 'vicious new McCarthyism'. This prompted the then Indigenous Affairs Minister Mal Brough to call for Ms Scrymgour's resignation, on the basis that she was 'not prepared to help her own people'. When questioned on some of Scrymgour's views, Rudd's response at that time was that she was 'wrong'.

The Federal election has vindicated Scrymgour's reading of her constituents. Labor received unprecedented support in the electorate of Lingiari, which covers 99.8 per cent of the Territory, polling up to 95 per cent at some remote area voting booths, including that of Wadeye, a community regularly visited by Mr Brough.

In an ironic turn of events, Scrymgour's promotion was matched by Brough losing his seat in Longman, an electorate named after the first woman elected to the Queensland Parliament.

The magnitude of the 10.7 per cent swing against Brough, almost twice the national average, indicates that the intervention was a low-key but critical factor in the election.

Indeed, the discriminatory elements of the Northern Territory intervention may well have played a part in John Howard's personal downfall. Howard had plenty of warning that Chinese and Korean voters, an increasingly substantive section of his electorate, were abandoning him. While their major concerns may have been interest rate rises and under-investment in health and public education, these voters could not fail to be concerned by the discriminating aspects of the Northern Territory intervention given Howard's previous form on race issues.

The results of the Federal election in Lingiari call into question the legal basis of the intervention. The Federal

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Government argued that the sections of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* that make discrimination unlawful do not apply in this case as the intervention is a 'special measure' for the benefit of the affected people.

But what is beneficial to people has to be judged by the individuals themselves. Through the electoral process Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory have stated that the intervention is not benefiting them.

Government policy needs to be designed, implemented and evaluated as close to the affected people as possible. We need to be using Aboriginal culture to strengthen our programs, to ensure their viability.

Rachel Willika, of Eva Valley community, told me that at her polling booth, people refused to take the Coalition how to vote paper. They said 'We don't want that CLP paper, we want

After the unseemly haste of a potentially election-saving 'emergency' intervention, it has been refreshing to hear Kevin Rudd announce that his Government will apologise early in his first parliamentary term, and that they 'would frame it in a consultative fashion with communities and that may take some time'.

Rudd has much to offer the Northern Territory intervention. In his first speech to Parliament in 1998, he spoke of an equality of opportunity that begins in the school system, of appallingly under-funded hospital systems, and of the need for a decent social security system to protect the weak. He stated that the provision of decent public housing was 'the right thing to do,' and spoke of education as both a tool of social justice as well as a fundamental driver of economic development. All of these views can inform a Northern Territory intervention that works.

More than anything else, Indigenous Australia needs well-informed evidence-based policy making, subject to on-going evaluation, not just in regards to outcomes but in terms of whether the actual process is succeeding.

In the Barunga region, there has been an increase in mortality and youth suicide rates since the intervention.

Aboriginal communities in remote areas are fragile, and it is well recorded that youth suicide rates and death rates go up during periods of additional stress, such as after the Katherine floods or the cyclone in Kalumburu. While the Coalition Government allocated more than \$1.3 billion to the intervention, no measures have been put in place to monitor its impact on the emotional welfare of these vulnerable communities, much less respond to any unanticipated consequences.

The key to success in the Northern Territory intervention lies with the relationship between Rudd's Government and

Scrymgour, in her capacity of Minister of Indigenous Affairs. If the Territory and Federal governments work together, with Aboriginal people as partners, using Aboriginal culture as a way of strengthening these programs, there is a great deal that can be achieved.

The confluence of a Federal government that promises to be consultative, socially progressive and economically responsible and an Aboriginal Deputy Chief Minister who really knows her electorate provides an unprecedented opportunity for life-changing policy outcomes for Aboriginal Territorians. Like all Australians, Aboriginal people want a better future for themselves and for their children.

Working together, Rudd and Scrymgour are in a position to help them achieve this.



Kevin Rudd



Marion Scrymgour  
Photo: Jack Dawutno