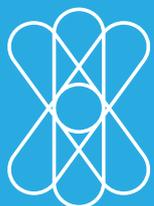


Case Study

Adaptation lessons from Cyclone Tracy Part II:

Institutional response and
Indigenous experiences of
Cyclone Tracy



NCCARF

National
Climate Change Adaptation
Research Facility



Adaptation Lessons from Cyclone Tracy Part 2: Institutional response and Indigenous experiences of Cyclone Tracy

Authors:

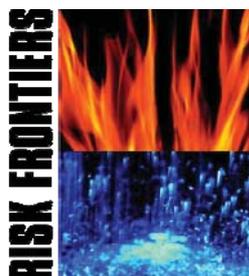
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Disclaimer:

The views and opinions expressed in this publication not necessarily the views of the Commonwealth, and the Commonwealth does not accept responsibility for any information or advice contained herein.

Title page image: Rover Thomas [Joolama] Kukatja/Wangkajunga peoples, 1926/1928 Australia – 1998, *Cyclone Tracy* 1991, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, Purchased 1991 © the artist's estate courtesy Warmun Art Centre

Cover image: Leaving Darwin © National Archives Australia.

... it's been on my mind for so long. Thank you so much for coming I didn't think anyone was interested. We have never been interviewed for it and it's my privilege to do that, and I'm happy (Respondent 7).

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Early on Christmas morning 1974 Tropical Cyclone Tracy, a Category 4 storm, devastated the Northern Territory city of Darwin leaving only 6% of the city's housing habitable. The extent of the disaster was largely the result of unregulated and poorly constructed buildings, predominantly housing. While the engineering and reconstruction process demonstrated a very successful response and adaptation to an existing and future risk, the impact of the cyclone on the local community and its Indigenous population in particular, had not been well recorded.

NCCARF therefore commissioned a report on the Indigenous experience of Cyclone Tracy to document how Indigenous people were impacted by, responded to, and recovered from Cyclone Tracy in comparison to non-Indigenous groups. The report also considers the research literature on disasters and Indigenous people in the Northern Territory, with a specific focus on cyclones, and considers the socio-political context of Indigenous communities in Darwin prior to Cyclone Tracy

Information was gathered through: (i) literature review; (ii) census data; (iii) oral history transcripts; and, (iv) via face-to-face interviews. Thirty-seven people's experience of Cyclone Tracy in Darwin were collated including 25 people interviewed in April and May 2011 and 12 transcripts from the Oral History Unit at the Northern Territory Archive Service. Of these, 23 were Indigenous and 14 were key government officials.

Demographic and socio-political context

At the time of Cyclone Tracy, the residents of Darwin, whether Indigenous or non-Indigenous, came from multiple backgrounds and found themselves living in Darwin for different reasons. The population included a substantial number of both permanent and transitory Aboriginal residents. The local Indigenous people are the Larrakia people, many of whom lived in public housing at that time. In addition, there were members of the Stolen Generation living in Darwin, who came from a range of backgrounds. Darwin had a small population with a relatively small (in contemporary terms) proportion of Indigenous people. The small total population size meant that there was closer contact between all populations. Moreover, the national political context at the time promoted the inclusion of Indigenous people as part of Australian society to a far greater extent than had previously been considered.

The immediate response

In the 12 months prior to Cyclone Tracy, a National Disaster Organisation (NDO) was established, with Cyclone Tracy its first event. The NDO response was one of command and control with a military General placed in charge of not only response, but also the recovery and rebuilding exercise. The decision to evacuate three-quarters of Darwin's population was made early to avoid the risk of additional health issues developing. Some research demonstrated that this rapid response impacted on the mental health, stress and recovery of the evacuees.

Cultural influence

The strong cultural connection with country was a factor both in different reflections on what had happened in the lead up to the cyclone and what happened post-cyclone. Many of the Indigenous respondents discussed very conventional warnings and

reactions to the cyclone, which mirrored the non-Indigenous accounts while some Indigenous respondents talked about the role of traditional knowledge in preparing them for the cyclone. Others discussed how they had been aware of this traditional knowledge but due to their cultural heritage being mixed with a more contemporary Australian education they had not taken the Indigenous early warnings seriously. Many noted that this was a lesson they had learnt the hard way and since Cyclone Tracy, they had learnt to interpret the signals in the environment. Almost all respondents noted their cultural attachment to country that made Indigenous people more likely to return to Darwin after the evacuation than non-Indigenous residents. Cyclone Tracy was interpreted by some elders as a punishment for Indigenous people who were losing touch with their cultural heritage.

The interviews revealed that in many ways Indigenous people considered that they were better able to cope and recover from the disaster than non-Indigenous people. This was because Indigenous people were often more self sufficient than their non-Indigenous neighbours, who they considered may not have had the same level of connection with the land and community, particularly those who had recently moved to Darwin.

In general, however, the Indigenous experience of Cyclone Tracy was very similar to that of the broader Darwin population. Participants did not have the sense that Indigenous people were treated substantially differently to non-Indigenous people in terms of evacuation procedures, health care, or resettlement. Nevertheless, the broader issue of racism was sometimes discussed and respondents felt that racism among the general population was worse now than it had been in the past. The majority also felt that Darwin was a nicer place to live before the cyclone. They considered it to be a smaller, friendlier community. Since then many think Darwin has developed too much, crime is an issue and it is now too busy and expensive.

Evacuation and return

Indigenous people were given the opportunity to be evacuated back to their communities or large city centres as part of the broader evacuation effort. While a policy of keeping family members together for Indigenous people only was stated, all Indigenous respondents in this research were not evacuated as a family unit. The process of evacuation caused concerns about whether their possessions would be there when they returned, or even if Darwin would ever exist again. Although many Indigenous respondents discussed very positively the assistance received while they were evacuated, in terms of food, clothes, fuel and other essential items, they also discussed homesickness for country, distress at being separated from family and the culture shock for children attending southern schools, staying in foreign places in cold climates and being shifted from one place to the next. The need to protect and care for their country was also discussed.

Many respondents reported that Indigenous family and friends returned as soon as possible to take up jobs, rejoin family and return to country. However, for many, this was accompanied by the horror of the still devastated city, difficult living conditions and a lack of services such as schooling.

In the 1970's, almost all housing in Darwin was provided by the government in one form or another – either housing for government workers (who were not expected to stay long enough to justify private housing investment), or public housing for Indigenous and low income people. After Cyclone Tracy, temporary housing was provided in the form of caravans or tents while homes were rebuilt.

Psychological impacts

For some respondents talking about the cyclone with friends and family was common while for others it was clear that the traumatic events remained difficult to discuss. There was no widespread counselling provided after the disaster and it was clear that people had never dealt with their trauma. Understandably people feared another cyclone of the magnitude of Tracy and this impacted on their likely actions and behaviour in a large cyclone. Many stated that although they knew that their homes were likely to be safe, they were more likely to go to the shelters or drive inland rather than stay at their homes. A number of other respondents, however, stated that they now felt safe in their homes due to the new building codes.

Future challenges and lessons learnt

The research has demonstrated that much of the Indigenous population living within Darwin is fairly urbanised and they are able to work with standard Australian emergency management warnings and procedures. Moreover, many Indigenous people are more resilient as they are not as reliant on material possessions, they could rely on the land for food and they have many family connections and people whom they could get help from. Nevertheless, itinerant individuals may remain vulnerable due to a lack of shelter and connection to communities. Current practice is to provide warning and shelter for these people when a cyclone alert is given. However, little research has examined the culturally appropriate emergency management response strategies (evacuation and recovery etc) for Indigenous Australians in the event of a large natural disaster.

Existing research highlights the need for Indigenous communities to plan their emergency management protocols well in advance of a crisis to ensure Indigenous protocols are adhered to while incorporating the demands of emergency service personnel. These policies and practice should also be considered in relation to transient itinerants and urbanised Indigenous people.

1. INTRODUCTION

Early on Christmas morning 1974 Tropical Cyclone Tracy, a Category 4 (Australian) storm, devastated the Northern Territory city of Darwin leaving only 6% of the city's housing habitable. The extent of the disaster was largely the result of unregulated and poorly constructed buildings, predominantly housing. The National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility (NCCARF) report entitled 'Cyclone Tracy Part 1: The Engineering Response', documents the learning and adaptations following the disaster from an engineering perspective (Mason and Haynes, 2010).

Part 1 of the NCCARF report uncovered a considerable amount of literature on the societal impacts on the non-Indigenous population. However, very little research concerning the Indigenous population and Cyclone Tracy was uncovered. NCCARF therefore funded an extension to the original research project in order to document the institutional response to and the Indigenous experience of Cyclone Tracy through a review of oral history transcripts and by undertaking in-depth interviews with survivors who are still living in Darwin today. As Cyclone Tracy occurred nearly 37 years ago it is considered essential to have these stories documented for future generations.

This report, Cyclone Tracy Part 2, is set out in three main sections. First, literature reviews are presented to provide background information. Second, an analysis of Census data is used to discuss changes in the characteristics and spatial distribution of Indigenous people in Darwin and the surrounding region. This is followed by a description of the key issues that arose from our analysis of oral history transcripts and face-to-face in-depth interviews with Indigenous people.

1.1 Aims of the study

1. Undertake a literature review to document how the experience of Cyclone Tracy led to changes in policy and practice. In particular, improve our understanding of the federal emergency management changes, the political barriers to adaptation, and, the impact on disaster research.
2. Conduct an analysis of research literature on disasters and Indigenous people in the Northern Territory, with a specific focus on cyclones.
3. Provide discussion on the socio-political context of Indigenous communities in Darwin prior to Cyclone Tracy.
4. Interrogate Census data to identify Indigenous population changes after Cyclone Tracy.
5. Document the Indigenous experience of Cyclone Tracy through qualitative interviews. Capturing how Indigenous people were impacted by, responded to, and recovered from Cyclone Tracy in comparison to non-Indigenous groups. This will provide an improved understand of the vulnerability and treatment of Indigenous people in Darwin during Cyclone Tracy.

2. METHODS

2.1 Literature Review

All relevant published and unpublished reports, journal articles and materials were reviewed in relation to changes in policy and practice to reduce disaster risks following Cyclone Tracy. This included federal emergency management changes, the political barriers to adaptation, and the impact on disaster research.

2.2 Census data collection and analysis

Quantitative data from the 1971 and 1976 Census was analysed to identify changes in the characteristics (number, gender, age etc) and spatial distribution of Indigenous people in Darwin and the surrounding region. Statistical analyses were conducted to compare Darwin and regional Indigenous populations (characteristics and spatial distribution) before and after Cyclone Tracy.

2.3 Data collection from oral history transcripts

Data were collected from the Oral Histories Unit at the Northern Territory Archives from February to May 2011. The Northern Territory Archives hold a collection of oral histories from people who have played a prominent role in Darwin life, lived or continue to live in Darwin and the surrounding regional areas. The program was begun in 1979 and aims to establish an oral history resource for research purposes. The Oral Histories Unit targets interviewees whose stories they wish to capture. Individuals can also nominate or be nominated to have their story documented. The collection was examined via computer based searches for accounts from Indigenous people who experienced Cyclone Tracy and also from key government/NGO officials / health care workers who were involved in the response and recovery process.

Only transcripts from those interviewees who consented for the Northern Territory Archives to make their data available for research purposes were used. Twelve transcripts were identified as containing information useful for the project. This data was treated as raw data and coded and analysed in the same way as interview data described in Section 2.4. Where appropriate, data collected from the Archives have been incorporated within the discussion of interviews conducted in April and May 2011. The demographics and details of transcripts used are outlined in Section 6.1.

2.4 Data collection via face-to-face interviewing

Qualitative interviewing was conducted face-to-face between April and May 2011. Nineteen Indigenous and six non-Indigenous respondents were interviewed. Respondents' details are outlined in Section 6.1. Interviews were arranged through a variety of people in Indigenous organisations within the Darwin area. This included the Emotional and Social Well Being Division of Danila Dilba, the Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation, Warddeken Land Management Limited, the Stolen Generation and the Northern Land Council. These organisations were targeted because they have strong links with Indigenous groups in the Darwin area.

Interview contacts were arranged through each of the abovementioned agencies and additional interviews were attained using a snowballing technique – where the initial respondent suggested others who would be suitable candidates to participate in the

research. Therefore, most interviews were arranged in person or by phone, through a trusted employee of one of the abovementioned agencies.

During the recruitment process, potential respondents were informed that they could decline the invitation to participate in the research and they were assured that if they declined, no further approaches would be made. In addition, respondents were informed during the interview process that they may withdraw from participation at any time, without consequence.

Indigenous people were asked to tell their story of Cyclone Tracy. Interviewees were prompted to focus on:

1. any personal preparation undertaken by them or their family,
2. how Cyclone Tracy impacted on them or their family,
3. their or their family's recovery process and how, if at all, their lives changed after Cyclone Tracy,
4. if, at all, they received any assistance,
5. how they think the Indigenous community changed after Cyclone Tracy (demographics and spatial distribution),
6. how Cyclone Tracy impacted on the distribution of food, goods, services and livelihood opportunities; and,
7. how do they view their current cyclone risk.

Key government / NGO personnel / health care workers who were in these positions during Cyclone Tracy were asked to tell how Cyclone Tracy impacted on their organisation and the wider community. These interviews were arranged through the organisations listed above and recommendations from other interviewees. The Northern Territory Archives Oral History transcripts provided a suitable replacement for interviewees who no longer lived in Darwin and / or could not be contacted.

Interviewees were prompted to focus on:

1. any preparation that was undertaken,
2. how their organisation and / or wider community recovered after Cyclone Tracy, if at all,
3. if their organisation and/or community received any assistance,
4. how they think the Indigenous community changed after Cyclone Tracy (demographics and spatial distribution),
5. how Cyclone Tracy impact on the distribution of food, goods, services and livelihood opportunities; and,
6. how they view their organisation's and wider community's current cyclone risk.

In total, through interviewing and the analysis of transcripts from the Northern Territory Oral History Unit the study has captured the views of 23 Indigenous people and 14 key government officials.

Qualitative data was recorded and transcribed directly into Microsoft Word® for easy analysis and coding. In many cases quotes and reactions from non-Indigenous officials are reported in Section 6. These provide a useful comparison with the Indigenous stories by means of highlighting differences, or in many cases, the similarities between the different groups.

A guiding principle of the primary research in this report is to allow Indigenous participants to tell their own stories without interference from the authors. However, Section 5 more specifically considers the social and cultural context of Darwin through

the eyes of co-author Professor Steve Larkin. Steve is a Larrakia man and was himself a teenager in Darwin when Cyclone Tracy made landfall.

2.4.1 Ethics approval process

A rigorous assessment of the ethical applications of this research was undertaken by Macquarie University. This process involved general ethics approval in addition to a specific application for research involving Indigenous people. Final ethics approval was granted on 30 March 2011 (Ethics Reference #: 5201001449).

In addition to participating in the research project presented in this report, respondents were given the opportunity to have their stories recorded at the Northern Territory Archives as part of the Oral History project, which involves storage of data (transcripts or recordings) on a public database. According to that agreement, a strict process of ensuring informed consent and of encouraging respondents to review interview transcripts or recordings before they are used in the Oral History project is being undertaken. All details of this agreement were disclosed to each respondent at the time of interviewing so they could consent to how they want their data used specifically (including the right to exclude it from the Oral History project). Participants were given the choice of having their story used: (1) only for the research presented in this report and to remain anonymous, (2) only for the research presented in this report and to have their details attached to their story or, (3) for the research presented in this report and also (fully or partly) for the Oral History project.

The option for respondents to have their name (and/or community) linked to their story was done to ensure that each person remained the custodian of any information and knowledge that they shared and to protect their collective interests. Where participants wished to remain anonymous, the information and knowledge that they shared is still linked to the Indigenous population in and around Darwin who experienced Cyclone Tracy in 1974.

In agreement with our ethics approval, financial reimbursement was given in the form of shopping gift vouchers to the organisations that helped secure interviews with their members. It is hoped that this money will be used to provide transport and/or food for individuals involved in future activities organised by each agency.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW OF INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE

This review examines the literature and documents adaptations, policy shifts and learning that have taken place post Cyclone Tracy. As such it will not cover research that has examined levels of government and organisational preparedness and public perceptions of cyclone risk prior to the disaster. However, as a form of introduction, a brief summary of relevant social science research is provided to explain some of the social factors implicated in the disaster (Table 1). This is followed by a summary of the formation and development of the Natural Disasters Organisation (NDO), the organisation that dealt with the evacuations and response during Tracy. The summary considers how the focus and activities of the NDO were affected by the political context and fallout from Cyclone Tracy. Next, a review of literature on the evacuation of Darwin and relevant research from the post Tracy years are discussed, including the impact on behaviour, land use planning and building codes. Lastly developments among the research community are described.

Table 1. Summary of social science research on Cyclone Tracy, adapted from Britton (1981).

Author	Overall conclusion
Gurd et al. (1975)	The people of Darwin were ill-prepared for a cyclone and were complacent.
Webber (1976)	It was Christmas Eve and people were busy, they had little experience of cyclones and very recently had experienced a false alarm where a cyclone had changed course.
Haas et al. (1976)	People did not understand the distinction between an alert and a watch. Evacuating to shelters or out of the city was not considered an option by many respondents. Many were grossly underinsured.
Western & Milne (1979)	One third of those who stayed and a quarter of those who evacuated took no action to prepare. At least 20% felt there should have been more information provided about the Cyclone and what people should do.
King (1979)	It had been thirty-five years since the previous Cyclone in Darwin and the population was highly transient.
Scanlon (1979)	The emergency plan was not followed prior to the storm and afterward none of the key people were available. Against protocol: the schools designated as shelters were locked and staff with keys were unavailable; the director of the Emergency Services did not organise a meeting of the emergency committee and police did not take home emergency radios. This work documents the efforts made by locals on the first day prior to the arrival of Major-General Stretton.

3.1 Natural disaster organisation, political changes and barriers to adaptation

At the time of Cyclone Tracy the Northern Territory was under Commonwealth jurisdiction. As such, the responsibility of disaster response was with the federal government and its representative agencies. The years leading up to Cyclone Tracy were coined by Britton and Wettenhall (1991) as the “*disaster years*”. In addition to some minor disasters, this period saw, the 1967 Hobart Bushfires; Cyclone Althea, which caused considerable damage to Townsville on Christmas Eve 1971; and the Brisbane floods of January 1974. Each of these large scale disasters overwhelmed the local capacity of state governments to provide effective disaster response and relief services and highlighted the need for a Federal capability (Britton and Wettenhall, 1991, Dwyer, 2006). Wettenhall (1979; p. 241) suggested: “*The smaller disasters continued, but it was these four events [this count includes Cyclone Tracy], coming in*

quick succession, that triggered the realisation that Australia's cities too were disaster prone."

To provide the necessary response capacity, the federal Natural Disasters Organisation (NDO) was formed, and came into operation in mid 1974. The NDO was administered by the Department of Defence, and its primary aim was to co-ordinate national resources during major disasters and also to administer programs to improve the capabilities of the state and local governments (Stretton, 1979). Occurring in its early and influential months, Cyclone Tracy had a critical role in the structuring of the newly formed NDO and for the development of disaster legislation and arrangements for states and territories (Jones, 2005).

Jones (2005), the first Director of Operations and Plans for the NDO, believes the fact that Cyclone Tracy hit Darwin, an isolated city under Commonwealth administration, focused the organisation on responding to distant disasters and the assistance of the armed forces in their civilian capacity. If the disaster had occurred in a state or territory jurisdiction, Jones (2005; p. 55) states: "*it may have concentrated attention on the key issues of public policy, inter-agency co-ordination, and the need for a whole-of-government approach.*"

Instead of the NDO only assuming a supportive role, Major-General Alan Stretton, the first and newly appointed Director-General of the NDO also took command of the Darwin area. As head of NDO it was Stretton's responsibility to co-ordinate the national response and relief operations. However, unusually, he was also given the authority to make decisions concerning the relief and recovery process which could only be superseded by the Australian Prime Minister (who was overseas in Europe at the time) and his deputy. The NDO was almost totally unprepared for its response to Cyclone Tracy and had no previous disaster experience (Britton and Wettenhall, 1991, Jones, 2005), though, given it had been in existence for less than a year, this is not surprising. Samuel (1975) suggests that the NDO committed all the *classic* disaster mistakes in their response to Cyclone Tracy, many of which could have been avoided with better training and preparation. In particular the NDO had failed to recognise the achievements made by the Darwin locals immediately after the Cyclone and also their ongoing capacity for response and relief (Scanlon, 1979, in Britton and Wettenhall, 1991; p. 18).

Britton and Wettenhall (1991) believe that conditions which surround an organisation before it is established and those which influence it at its birth and infancy will significantly influence its development. The NDO's inception within the Department of Defence and the appointment of an active senior officer as its Director were critical moulding factors constraining its future development. In the years following Cyclone Tracy the NDO made little progress in becoming a disaster co-ordinating centre. Although the Civil Defence College at Mt Macedon was twice refurbished as an emergency and disasters college, and despite best intentions, no significant research team has ever been based there. Britton and Wettenhall (1991; p. 19) suggest: "*After its Darwin adventure the NDO took a nose dive from which it would take many years to recover...if indeed, it ever fully recovered.*"

In 1993, the NDO became known as Emergency Management Australia (EMA). Practice also developed at this time to include a more comprehensive risk management approach with a greater appreciation of community awareness programmes. In late 2001, following the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York, EMA was relocated from the Department of Defence to the Attorney-General's portfolio. A review in the same year commissioned by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG)

examined and overhauled policy and funding arrangements for the management of natural disasters (Department of Transport and Regional Services, 2004).

Cyclone Tracy coincided with the then Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam's overhaul of intergovernmental relationships, giving a greater Federal role in many areas of state policy (Dwyer, 2006). Fiscal centralisation at this time and an increase in the use of the Specific Purpose Payment (SPP) grant scheme meant that the financial autonomy of the states and territories was reduced (Dwyer, 2006). For Darwin, this meant that much debate concerning redevelopment occurred at the Federal level. The impact of the cyclone highlighted several problems with the way the regional government was set up, which led to a greater demand for self-governance that was finally given in 1978.

Once Darwin became self governing, it became more acceptable for the Commonwealth government to provide grants for reconstructing Darwin rather than seen to be giving 'aid' (Dwyer, 2006). According to Dwyer (2006), in the years following Cyclone Tracy the SPP grants were the dominant means for states and territories to receive funding for disaster management. The grants followed the Federal government's traditional approach of *responding* to disasters and were provided for relief and reconstruction purposes. The system was overhauled in 2003 following the review commissioned by COAG. However, Dwyer (2006) concludes that the previous system of SPP grants held back the capacity of the states in the areas of mitigation and preparedness, entrenching the NDO position as a respondent to disasters, not a body to mitigate their effects.

Another change which is clearly identifiable to lessons learnt in the recovery period post Cyclone Tracy was the development of a traceable database of disaster victims through a National Registration and Inquiry System. Steps were also taken to remedy the lack of legal authority and protocol for making arrangements between different government departments and levels (Haas *et al.*, 1976). However, effective collaboration and coordination of Commonwealth, state, territory and local government was not really initiated until the natural hazard reforms commissioned by COAG were applied in 2003.

In their final report the Darwin Disaster Welfare Council, recommended that:

- federal funds be made available to coordinate welfare activities, which should be incorporated in the local state emergency services programme,
- funding for the research into the longer term health and welfare of the impacted community and to monitor events during the emergency,
- disaster oriented training and debriefing made available for welfare staff, and
- an appropriate body should consider the need for a National co-ordinated welfare plan (Darwin Disaster Welfare Council, 1976).

3.2 The evacuation of Darwin

The evacuation of Darwin deserves mention here due to its unprecedented scale. Evacuation as a strategy stems from a well established and long standing public safety principle in emergency management, and there are many circumstances where evacuation is the only sensible option (Haynes *et al.*, 2009). The population of Darwin was approximately 45,000 – 47,000 when Cyclone Tracy hit (Stretton, 1976). Major-General Stretton immediately made arrangements to evacuate 10,000 of the injured, sick and most vulnerable (Table 2). Over the next few days, due to the extreme level of devastation, particularly the non-functioning sanitary sewer system and consequent threat of disease in addition to the possibility of another cyclone remobilising fallen

debris, it was decided that the majority of the rest of the population should also be evacuated (Haas *et al.*, 1976). It was decided that the population be reduced to 10,500 residents, a number Stretton deemed small enough to cope with the limited shelter and difficult conditions but big enough to maintain the functions of a city and provide a nucleus for reconstruction (Stretton, 1976). At Stretton's first press conference he stated (Stretton, 1976; p. 69): "*everyone here is a mouth to feed and things have to be flown in. We must thin out the population.*"

Table 2. Stretton's criteria for evacuation. Adapted from Stretton (1976).

Priority	Criteria
Priority 1	Sick and injured; pregnant women
Priority 2	Women and children only, unless father was deemed to be essential for the wellbeing of the group
Priority 3	Elderly People
Priority 4	Married Couples
Priority 5	Single People

The evacuation, albeit highly encouraged, was voluntary, unless a matter of life and death. Almost 25,000 people were evacuated through the Darwin airport in the five days following the disaster. A number also left by their own means, with approximately 2,500 leaving by vehicle within two days of the disaster, and up to 10,000 over the entire period of evacuation (Stretton, 1976).

When the initial momentum for evacuation fell the government agreed to pay the return fare for each evacuee to Darwin, rapidly restimulating the process. Stretton (1976) reflects surprisingly that his judgment to encourage the evacuation of almost 35,000 people from Darwin and to leave behind 10,500 was never challenged. He recognised that the splitting up of families through the priority-led evacuation protocol may have been an issue for mental and social healing. However, on balance, given the level of destruction and bearing in mind the logistical problems of feeding and housing such large numbers of people, he judged it to be the correct and only practical solution.

Research on the impacted population post Cyclone Tracy (Milne, 1977a, Milne, 1977b, Western and Milne, 1979) suggested that evacuation may potentially delay the physical and mental recovery process. These researchers compared non-returned evacuees, returned evacuees and Darwin stayers with the aim of comparing the personal and social adaptation of the three Darwin groups. The study found that the adverse effects (e.g. depression, lacking in energy, overweight, taking it out on the children, etc.) were more severe among those that left than those who remained, and in particular for the non-returned evacuees. People who stayed became part of a 'therapeutic community' and were able to participate in the cleanup and restoration efforts, suffering less physical and mental health problems than those who left. However, as the authors note, the non-returned evacuees suffered most from the primary impacts of the Cyclone (i.e. injury and material losses).

One must therefore question whether the key factor inhibiting their recovery was the evacuation, as Milne implies, or simply the higher degree of damage and loss experienced by this group. It is also possible that their trauma may have been greater had they chosen not to evacuate. However, Western and Milne (1979) later demonstrate, through a more detailed analysis of the data, that when the stress levels of all those who experienced substantial losses are examined those in the non-returned evacuees group fared the worst. It is still interesting to note that only 25% of the total evacuees surveyed actually regretted the decision to evacuate (Milne, 1977a).

The Darwin Welfare Council (a co-ordinating body for agencies involved in recovery) recommended in their final report that the mass evacuation of Darwin raised a number of social and familial strains. They recommended that in future emergencies, if evacuation is needed, families be moved as a social unit in order that fathers remained with the family. In addition, they recommend that a network of centres be established in order that evacuees remained in constant communication with the area evacuated (Darwin Disaster Welfare Council, 1976).

Although the level of control given to General Stretton and his ultimate decision to evacuate a large number of Darwin's residents, and in particular the splitting up of families, has been criticised, the emergency medical team sent to Darwin commended his decisions. As Scott-Findlay (1975; p. 645) notes: "...the extraordinary speed of the evacuation literally made much of the possible patient load disappear...without one person in supreme command, human chaos is added to natural chaos..."

It is worth noting that the decision to evacuate had been tabled at a meeting of city officials before Stretton's arrival in Darwin (a point Stretton himself is quick to point out). Scanlon (1979) conducted an interview with one of the officials present at this meeting who stated that the Director of Health was largely responsible for the decision to evacuate, even though this was taken as a consensus agreement. In a speech in Canberra in May 1976, Stretton reported that on arrival in Darwin, (Scanlon, 1979; p. 145): "it was put to me by some of the leading people that the whole of Darwin should be abandoned."

Perhaps unique to this disaster were the great distances that people had to be evacuated, with Adelaide (3000 km away) being the *nearest* state capital city. The isolation of Darwin is unusual and the need to evacuate people such distances is unlikely to eventuate elsewhere. More importantly, given the improved wind resistance embodied in the reconstruction (Mason and Haynes 2010), a similar event to Cyclone Tracy would not produce such widespread destruction in Darwin and thus would obviate the need for large scale evacuation. Of course, more extreme events are possible.

In all, Stretton (1976) believes that the evacuation of Darwin achieved its goals without any further loss of life and he suggests that the evacuation was aided because of the following factors:

- Cyclone Tracy occurred less than six months after the NDO was formed. Had the event occurred before this organisation came into being Stretton (1976) suggests that there would have been complete chaos in Canberra, it would have taken many days until the hierarchy had established an organisation capable of exercising a coordinated response and therefore, additional loss of life might not have been prevented.
- The cyclone occurred on Christmas Day, which meant that government officials in Darwin and Canberra were on stand down allowing the NDO to seize the initiative with minimal red tape.
- He was given almost complete authority to run the response, and that the general population, as well as local officials, reacted well to his style, incentives and personality. Having a committee making overarching decisions in a time poor situation could have been unnecessarily costly.

A significant issue that hindered the evacuation/response process was the loss of communication and power because of the storm. Stretton (1976) suggests that the loss of communication (civil and military) between Darwin and Canberra, and within Darwin itself, was the most unsatisfactory part of the Darwin disaster. He exemplifies the

importance of the issue by suggesting that if there had been an enemy attack, the rest of Australia would not have known that Darwin was in enemy hands. This is an issue that came out of Cyclone Tracy and must be addressed in all isolated regions prone to disasters.

3.3 Post cyclone Tracy years

3.3.1 Impact on behaviour

As the 1975 cyclone season approached, the NDO became concerned that many of the returned Darwin residents were living in temporary accommodation and caravans due to delays in the rebuilding process (Stretton, 1976). It was considered that the fragile dwellings would provide little protection during strong winds and there was an added risk from loose debris which had still not been cleared after Cyclone Tracy. There was also confusion over who would take the lead role in planning for and responding to a future disaster. Under the guidance of the NDO, a disaster plan was designed and a counter-disaster exercise carried out successfully in October 1975, ironing out many issues in terms of responsibility and planning (Stretton, 1976). In addition a Tropical Cyclone Information programme was launched by the NDO in time for the 1975 / 76 season covering areas at risk in WA, NT, QLD, NSW, and Cocos, Christmas, Lord Howe and Norfolk Islands.

The occurrence of Cyclone Max in 1981, seven years after Cyclone Tracy, was the first cyclone to make landfall in Darwin since Cyclone Tracy and allowed researchers to examine any adaptations in the social and emergency management response. Britton (1981) carried out a series of interviews with key officials and members of the public immediately after Cyclone Max. The overall aim of the study was to examine evidence of a "disaster subculture" in Darwin, where the experience or repeat experience of a hazard or threat encourages people to build risk reduction and adaptation into their everyday lives. Their response to the hazard therefore becomes routine and the threat is normalised (Britton, 1981). Approximately 40% of the population in Darwin in 1981 had experienced Cyclone Tracy, and it was believed that the remaining new population were well aware of Cyclone Tracy's destruction. Although Britton (1981) states that his study is preliminary and should not be considered "comprehensive or representative", a number of his findings merit sufficient reliability to suggest a developing disaster subculture.

The main findings of the study include:

- Once warnings of the high possibility for landfall were issued most people reacted with a high degree of 'practicality and compliance'. The greater proportion of preparatory measures had been activated well before the expected arrival of Cyclone Max.
- Authorities expected most people to remain in their homes or the homes of neighbours. Although 80% did so, more people than was anticipated attended public shelters (15%) or moved out of Darwin (5% in 1,500 vehicles).
- Cyclone Max was originally forecast to pass over Darwin earlier in the day. However, the storm system remained stationary for a number of hours and gave people ample time to finalise their preparedness measures and undertake extra precautions.
- The majority of residents who stayed at home spent much of their time monitoring the progress of the cyclone from media reports on the radio and television.

- The majority of people in the shelters had cleared up their properties and secured their homes prior to moving to the shelters.
- Those who evacuated out of Darwin were a combination of permanent residents, caravan park dwellers and holiday makers. The dominant group were those who wanted to evacuate their possessions – expensive car and caravan owners (approximately 60% of those who passed through the police check points). The second group were predominantly those who had experienced Cyclone Tracy and did not want to go through another cyclone. The third group were holiday makers. Many from the first and second group were women and children whose husbands were working. These evacuations were not panic driven but the implementation of a pre-arranged plan should a cyclone be forecast.
- No respondents thought the disaster-relevant organisations or the city as a whole had in any way over-reacted to the threat posed by Cyclone Max.

Britton (1981) concluded that there was a noticeable increase in the level of awareness and preparedness measures undertaken prior to Cyclone Max compared to Cyclone Tracy. This is in contrast to the findings of Irwin (1979) who found that Cyclone Tracy had made little impact on the population and, in the event of a future cyclone, preparedness measures would only be carried out when the threat was imminent. On the contrary, Britton (1981) identified little evidence of people failing to undertake counter-disaster measures well in advance of the Cyclone Max's intended landfall. However, Britton (1981) also found that the population's knowledge about cyclone warning cues, the terminology used and the destructiveness of different wind velocities needed improvement before a full disaster subculture could be declared. In addition, the development of a sub-culture would depend on the characteristics of the next cyclone event and how they were perceived by the public. A more recent study (Li 2009b) found that the differences between the perceptions of laypeople and experts concerning cyclone wind damage, storm surge risks and life safety risks were negligible when the layperson was a long-term resident.

3.3.2 Land use planning and building codes

Li (2009a) examines changes in building codes and land use planning to reduce cyclone risk (wind and storm surge) in Darwin pre and post Cyclone Tracy. The study identifies both the adaptive policies made and explores the barriers to their effective implementation resulting in maladaptive practices. The term "policy" is used loosely in the study to include formal or informal actions taken by governments or organisations to recognise a problem and state how they intend to remedy it. The term maladaptive refers simply to an action that increases risk. It does not necessarily mean the risk is increased to an unacceptable level. Table 3 outlines the main adaptive and maladaptive practices identified by Li (2009a).

Table 3. The adaptive and mal-adaptive practices identified by Li (2009a).

Year	Event	Learning	Adaptive policy	Maladaptive practice
1897	Cyclone	No action on building safety but learning about wind damage		
1937	Cyclone			
1967	The Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) conducted a study of storm surge and wave action in Darwin	storm surge risk may be severe, in which case unplanned development may prove disastrous	No specific recommendation were made for planning options in Darwin	
1972	-	-	Adoption of a new wind code	The code was not required by law and its use was not widespread
1974		Government and engineers' response to wind damage caused by Cyclone Tracy was immediate	Increase in the engineering wind load requirements in the building code	Issue of cost became prohibitive and the initial wind loading requirements were reduced
		Although storm surge damage was minimal it was considered a significant future threat by planners	Abandonment of northern suburbs for settlement, concentration of the population in the southern half of the city and relocation of the airport	Met with opposition by the public. Commonwealth government agree to re-build Darwin on its current site
1975 onwards	Privatisation of the building inspection process, negligent building practices and the use of lighter, climate friendly, more comfortable material for building	-	-	Building wind strength has decreased. Increased risk of damage from flying debris
	Numerous studies have calculated the storm surge zone in Darwin		The NT Planning Scheme Amendment 2006, identifies land use planning as an adaptive approach to storm surge risk	Number of people and assets in the storm surge zone has increased

3.4 Cyclone Tracy's impact on disaster research

Cyclone Tracy, along with the other major disasters in Hobart, Townsville and Brisbane in the late 60's and early 70's, raised awareness of disaster issues amongst the Australian research community. In comparison to academic scholars in the USA, who had begun to publish relevant documents in the area in the 1950s and 1960s, Australian researchers had previously not been concerned with disasters as a social issue (Wettenhall, 1979). In response to this awakening of interest, the Australian Academy of Science, aided by the Academy of Social Sciences, sponsored a natural hazard symposium in 1976 (Heathcote and Thom, 1979, Wettenhall, 1979). The aim of the conference was to pool available knowledge and break down the barriers that existed between isolated groups.

Those who attended the conference included federal and state civil servants; the police, emergency personnel and health and welfare officials; researchers covering the full range of social and physical sciences; and insurance industry representatives (Wettenhall, 1979). One output of the conference was the development of a steering committee, formed to draw up plans for a Natural Hazards Council, with both federal and state representation. This Council may have been able to remedy the NDO's inability to educate, conduct research or develop working relationships with other organisations involved in disaster situations. However, the formation of the Council did not eventuate due to a bureaucratic delay within the government, compounded by the fact that no disasters occurred in the years immediately after Cyclone Tracy (Britton and Wettenhall, 1991). In addition, Wettenhall (1979), states that the participation of insurance industry representatives at the symposium began the government's consideration of a national insurance scheme for disaster relief (Mason and Haynes, 2010). Bar a couple of presentations on building design, the symposium did not cover prevention and adaptations to reduce disaster risk. Instead, the conference focused primarily on the physical phenomena themselves and emergency response, whereas papers on insurance, better land-use regulations and adjustments for disaster prevention were what was needed (Kates, 1979).

3.5 Summary

It was not only Cyclone Tracy, but the sequence of large disasters in four Australian urban centres between 1967 and 1974 that prompted the government and research community to consider appropriate disaster policy and research needs. However, until recently, and with the exception of building codes; policy, management and research have been fixated on the response and recovery phases of disasters. Adjustments to actually reduce disaster risks, such as adequate land use planning, have largely been neglected and large scale disasters continue to occur within Australia.

The NDO / EMA

The location of the NDO / EMA within the defence department for much of its lifetime greatly reduced its capacity for learning and adaptation post Cyclone Tracy due to its response culture. In addition, because of the high profile and widely criticised actions of General Stretton, the appointments of Director-General in the years following Tracy have been purposefully low-profile personalities unlikely to make an impact on disaster policy or management (Britton and Wettenhall, 1991).

The research community

The Australian Academy of Science, aided by the Academy of Social Sciences, sponsored a natural hazard symposium in 1976. The symposium focused on the physical phenomena themselves and emergency response. Papers on insurance, land-use regulations and adjustments for disaster prevention were absent.

The evacuation of Darwin

Approximately 35,000 people were evacuated from Darwin. The most vulnerable were evacuated first, which in many cases meant that fathers were separated from their wives and children. Research has demonstrated that being evacuated can delay the physical and mental recovery process (Milne 1977a; 1977b; Western and Milne, 1979). The Darwin Welfare Council recommended that in future emergencies, if evacuation is needed, families be moved as a social unit in order that fathers remain with the family. In addition, network centres should be established in order that evacuees remain in constant communication with the area evacuated. However, the level of destruction which occurred in Darwin and the isolation of the city is unusual. On the other hand,

due to the building codes now in place in Darwin, it is unlikely that people outside of the surge zone will need to be evacuated in a similar event (Mason and Haynes, 2010).

The development of a disaster sub-culture

The occurrence of Cyclone Max in 1981 allowed researchers to examine adaptations made in the social and emergency management response since Cyclone Tracy (Britton, 1981). Research concluded that there was a noticeable increase in the level of public awareness and preparedness measures undertaken prior to Max compared to Tracy. However, the population's knowledge needed improvement before a full disaster sub-culture could be declared. More recent research has demonstrated that the differences between the perceptions of laypeople and experts concerning cyclone wind damage, storm surge risks and life safety risks were negligible when the layperson was a long-term resident (Li, 2009b).

4. LITERATURE REVIEW OF DISASTERS AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

It is not the intention to provide a detailed literature review of local Indigenous knowledge of long term and changing climate patterns in Australia or Indigenous issues, climate change and extreme events from an international perspective. However, a brief overview of the latest research on disasters and Indigenous people in the Northern Territory is provided in order to place this work in context. In particular recent research in relation to cyclones will be drawn on. The relevance of this material to that discovered in relation to Cyclone Tracy will be considered in the discussion.

According to Green *et al.* (2009) the research community has, to date, paid little attention to the vulnerability and adaptive capacity of Indigenous communities in Northern Australia. The Northern Territory is already highly exposed to a number of natural hazard events, including, cyclones and associated storm surges, riverine and flash flooding, coastal erosion, bushfires and drought. On average a cyclone passes within 200 km of Darwin every one to two years. The expected recurrence interval of an event similar to or stronger than Cyclone Tracy (category 4 event) impacting Darwin is greater than 100 years (Mason *et al.*, 2011).

As noted by Veland *et al.* (2010) hazards research has begun to address cross-cultural issues and the integration of Indigenous and western knowledge for disaster prevention (see Mercer *et al.*, 2009). However, apart from a minority (see Doohan, 2004, Veland *et al.*, 2010) little research has examined the culturally appropriate emergency management response strategies (evacuation and recovery etc) for Indigenous Australians in the event of a large natural disaster.

Cyclone Monica, a category 5 storm, made landfall in the Northern Territory (NT) on 24 April 2006. It was originally anticipated that Cyclone Monica would make landfall over the remote Island of Waruwi initiating an evacuation of the community by emergency services. However, the cyclone changed track late in the day and made landfall 35 km to the west of Maningrida, a township on the Arnhem Land Coast (6-8 hours drive east of Darwin). Maningrida has a population of approximately 2,500 people, 92% of whom are Indigenous (Green *et al.*, 2009, Veland *et al.*, 2010). A wind gust of 148 km per hour was recorded in Maningrida at 6.40 pm and the community received substantial damage to homes, shade trees and power lines (from wind and falling trees (BOM, 2006, Veland *et al.*, 2010). No deaths or serious injuries were recorded. Other significant impacts included a 5-6 metre storm surge around the area of landfall, the defoliation of an area approximately 7,000 km² and heavy rain throughout the region, causing severe flooding in the Adelaide River catchment (BOM, 2006, Green *et al.*, 2009). Veland *et al.* (2010) investigated the emergency management response and evacuation of the Island community of Waruwi and also the response and impacts on Maningrida. The salient findings are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. A summary of the salient findings from Veland *et al.* (2010) documenting the impacts and response to Cyclone Monica in the communities of Waruwi and Maningrida, NT.

Exposure and vulnerability	NT characterised by small remote communities, with vulnerable infrastructure and poor emergency planning
	Building codes only provide protection to category 4 events or lower
Emergency management issues and plans	Cross cultural issues have not been well addressed in terms of evacuation and recovery
	No mention is made of following Indigenous protocol during response and recovery activities within the 'Northern Territory All Hazards Emergency Management Arrangements'
	Traditional top-down command and control approaches may go against social protocol
	Indigenous governance structures will influence local responses to formal response strategies. If not recognised this will hinder emergency management
	Elders are responsible for environmental safety
Evacuation of Waruwi community off Island	NT emergency services organised the evacuation of 350 community members on 24 April 2006
	Although overlooked by the emergency services key elders and traditional owners played an important role in ensuring the success of the evacuation, through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • locating individuals who needed assistance • persuading those reluctant to evacuate that it was necessary • ensuring avoidance relationships were respected in transport groupings
Evacuation of Maningrida community to the local school	A rapid evacuation was initiated by emergency services and several households had to be forcibly relocated
	Initially rooms were taken in the school in accordance with avoidance relationships. However, damage to the roof overnight necessitated that people disregard protocol and shelter together in one room.
Recovery of Maningrida	The community received limited outside attention and support. Rebuilding was therefore slow and completed by the community themselves.
Conclusions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous communities plan their emergency management protocols well in advance • Utilise Indigenous liaison officers or emergency management staff trained in Indigenous affairs • Update the 'Northern Territory All Hazards Emergency Management Arrangements' to include the need to follow Indigenous protocol in response activities

Cyclone Monica highlighted the need for Indigenous communities to plan their emergency management protocols well in advance of a crisis. However, this must also be combined with emergency managers who appreciate that protocols must be followed and official guidelines to this effect included within the Northern Territory All Hazards Emergency Management Arrangements (Veland *et al.*, 2010). In comparison to Maningrida the successful management of the disaster response at Waruwi was due to the actions of strong local leaders who ensured Indigenous protocols were adhered to while incorporating the demands of emergency service personnel (Veland *et al.*, 2010).

Doohan (2004) documented similar work in an effort to improve the engagement between Indigenous communities and the Fire and Emergency Services Authority (FESA) in Western Australia. This work also noted the need for agreed plans between host and guest communities who have been evacuated, including: how to deal with alcohol and the provision of gender and avoidance relationships in residential areas. Difficulties noted by FESA, include: understanding the community and recognising the

decision making processes and decision makers, and identifying appropriate groupings of people (Doohan, 2004).

Green *et al.* (2009) identified that in comparison to the white population of Maningrida, who were traumatized by the event, the Indigenous population were 'remarkably' unaffected by the passage of the cyclone. Cyclones are principally viewed by non-Indigenous people as negative events, dangerous to lives and property. In comparison, cyclones are socially, culturally and economically important to Indigenous people. Doohan (2004) notes that Australian Indigenous people positively view cyclones as creative entities that bring renewal but also negatively as a punishment when improper engagement with the natural or supernatural world has taken place. Other extreme climatic events such as flooding and lightning induced bushfires are similarly viewed as elements of a breathing landscape of which Indigenous people are entwined (Doohan, 2004, Rose, 1996, Rose, 2005).

However, it is not a simplistic relationship. Rather than the occurrence of a hazard being interpreted as a direct form of punishment, Indigenous communities realise that they must maintain responsible social and environmental practices in order to have the capacity to cope and recover from the event (Veland *et al.*, 2010). Severe impacts received by a population are therefore better viewed as a punishment for losing their resilience, either through misuse of the environment or social changes that increase their vulnerability. Indigenous culture also tells of the ability for some members of the community to 'sing storms'. On Waira, North Goulburn Island, West Arnhem Land, local culture tells of a location within the reef where, if a spear is thrown, a storm will be induced (Veland *et al.*, 2010). Similarly, in the desert communities of Fitzroy and Balgo and the West Kimberley communities of Mowunjam and Kalumburu individuals can bring on and stop rainfall (Doohan, 2004).

Indigenous people rely significantly on large areas of the coast of Tropical Northern Australia for their livelihoods. Climate change poses a significant threat to these natural resources through a range of potential impacts including: rising sea levels, changes and threats to biodiversity, changes in temperature and seasons and also the increased frequency of extreme weather such as floods, droughts and storms / cyclones (Green *et al.*, 2009). Indigenous Australian's are one group likely to feel the impacts of climate change the hardest. This is due to a continuing cycle of political, social and economic marginalization leading to disadvantages in health, education and employment (Howitt, 2010). These inequalities, which have led to an 11 year gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non Indigenous groups (COAG, 2009), constrain the ability of many Indigenous people to cope and adapt to external shocks and climate stresses. However, Indigenous people are also likely to adopt coping strategies, such as migration, and may be resilient, due to a culture that has learnt to exist and adapt to a harsh environment.

Further research is needed to determine and understand what, if any, coping and adaptation strategies Indigenous people may be able to employ, and how they can best be supported. Furthermore, despite increasing recognition of the increased vulnerability and resilience held by Indigenous groups there has, to date, been little allowance for meaningful input from Indigenous people (Petheram *et al.*, 2010). In particular Indigenous people possess valuable traditional knowledge of past and current changes (Green *et al.*, 2010). Although this knowledge is now recognised by researchers as a vital source of environmental data, however, access to, and the use of that knowledge to benefit all Australians must be appropriate (Green *et al.*, 2010).

The collection and use of local Indigenous knowledge of long term and changing climate patterns in Australia is beyond the scope of this report and the reader is

referred to Green *et al.* (2010) and Petheram *et al.* (2010). Detailed information on the risks from climate change to Indigenous communities in Northern Australia is available from Green *et al.* (2009).

A selection of more general worldwide sources on Indigenous issues, climate change and extreme events that may also be of interest include: Cronin *et al.* (2004); Davis (2005); Gearheard *et al.* (2010); Krupnik and Jolly (2002); Kuruppu and Liverman (2011); Leduc (2007); McAdoo *et al.* (2009); Mercer *et al.* (2009); and, two special issues of journals focused on Indigenous issues and climate change edited by Ford and Furgal (2009) and Green and Raygorodetsky (2010).

5. DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT

5.1 Nature of the community in Darwin prior to Cyclone Tracy

At the time of Cyclone Tracy, the residents of Darwin, whether Indigenous or non-Indigenous, came from multiple backgrounds and found themselves living in Darwin for different reasons. Many had only lived in the town for a short while, and, particularly the non-indigenous residents, did not regard Darwin as 'home' in any long-term sense. The population included a substantial number of both permanent and transitory Aboriginal residents. Darwin's population was, and continues to be a constant ebb and flow of people from indigenous communities throughout the Northern Territory and indeed Northern Australia. This permanent and floating Indigenous population was also very mixed, in terms of traditional orientation and background, including many very acculturated, well-educated middle class Aboriginal residents and families, as well as many very traditionally orientated individuals, and of course a considerable spectrum in between (e.g. Memmott et al, 2006; Sansom, 1988).¹

There are very few surviving contemporary research reports on the nature of Indigenous settlement in Darwin in the early 1970s. The local Indigenous people are the Larrakia people, many of whom lived in public housing at that time. In addition, there were members of the Stolen Generations. The "Stolen Generations" refers to Indigenous children who, through a series of laws, practices and policies, were forcibly removed from their families between 1910 and 1970 and re-settled in missions and homes, including in Darwin (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997). During the time of Cyclone Tracy, many members of the Stolen Generations, as well as Indigenous people from remote communities in the Northern Territory (and perhaps beyond), were housed in hostels. These people had moved temporarily or permanently into Darwin as part of the urbanisation process which continues to this day (Taylor and Carson, 2009). Experience and cultural knowledge of cyclones was likely to be tied to country (e.g. Larrakia people had knowledge of cyclones, while desert people had not).

To the best of our knowledge, the Indigenous population was likely to be younger than the non-Indigenous population, and to have a more even balance of males and females (the non-Indigenous population was very much male dominated). While there is no information readily available about socio-economic status, it can be assumed that at least some of the Indigenous populations (particularly those from remote communities and those living in hostels and town camps) were substantially economically disadvantaged when compared to non-Indigenous populations.

There are a number of political, social and cultural happenings that might be relevant to the Indigenous experience of Cyclone Tracy. These include shifts in Indigenous policy associated with the 1967 Referendum on citizenship, the land rights movement, the changes in 'stolen generation' policies, and attempts to reclaim the local (Larrakia) Indigenous culture, which had been marginalised by European settlement. Darwin itself was also undergoing a period of broader social change, with its rapidly growing population, the emergence of the self-government movement for the Northern Territory², and the increased settlement of rural villages (e.g., Humpty Doo and Howard Springs) on the outskirts of Darwin. Through all this, Darwin and the Northern Territory held (and continues to hold) a unique place in the mythology of Australia – as a frontier, a symbol of occupation of an otherwise untamed land, home of 'authentic' Indigenous

¹ The details within this paragraph have been provided by personal communication with Professor Joseph Reser, 2011

² At the time of Tracy, Darwin remained under Commonwealth control.

culture. The complexities of context have been written about by a number of authors, e.g. Carment's (2005) *Australia's Northern Capital*, West's (2000) article in the *Journal of Australian Studies* (and his PhD thesis available through the University of Queensland library), and Bunbury's (1994) book *Cyclone Tracy: picking up the pieces as examples*.

The political, demographic, social, cultural and physical context at the time of Cyclone Tracy is explored in detail below from the unique perspective of co-author Professor Steve Larkin. Steve is a Larrakia man who experienced Cyclone Tracy and its aftermath.

Political context: The national political context at the time promoted the inclusion of Indigenous people as part of Australian society to a far greater extent than had previously been considered. The 1967 constitutional referendum was still relatively fresh in people's minds as a statement about the status of Indigenous people. The Labor Party with Gough Whitlam as Prime Minister was promoting a new social agenda at the federal government level. The political language of inclusion arising from this was perhaps stronger in the Northern Territory than in other states because of the direct administrative role played by the federal government. While the language of inclusion had emerged strongly, there was not yet the language of 'disadvantage' and separate treatment (in health, education, economic engagement etc.) that has since emerged (see, for example, Johns, 2011, Lea, 2008).

Demographic context: Darwin had a small population with a relatively small (in contemporary terms) proportion of Indigenous people. The small total population size meant that there was closer contact between all populations. There was also a very mixed non-Indigenous population as a legacy of in-migrations of people of Chinese, Greek, Italian and other heritages (Carson *et al.*, 2010). While there was recognition of cultural diversity and ethnic labelling was common, there was also an expectation that Darwin social, cultural, sporting, and economic activities would include people from a variety of backgrounds. Another prominent demographic characteristic was the extent to which males outnumbered females across the general population, even though there was a proportionately large population of children. This reflects a "frontier demography" (Carson, 2011) which sees the male role as protecting women and children from the harsh living conditions at the frontier. In a crisis situation like Cyclone Tracy, women and children would be prioritised for care irrespective of whether they were Indigenous or non-Indigenous women and children.

Social context: Consistent with the demographic context, the small size of Darwin meant people mixed a great deal. Sport played a particularly important role given the relatively young age structure of the population. Sports teams were generally mixed Indigenous / non-Indigenous (there were no specific 'Indigenous' sports clubs, for example), and sports facilities were the dominant social infrastructure around Darwin. Schools and workplaces were also mixed environments, with far fewer programs separating Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers or students than exist in contemporary Darwin society. As a result, social events were expected to include a mix of people.

Cultural context: Present-day Indigenous people often distinguish between Larrakia Indigenous people and other Indigenous people who may be from relatively nearby (Tiwi Islands, Katherine, Borroloola) or distant places. The acknowledgement of specific Indigenous cultures was not so strong in 1974. While some Larrakia people had presented their petition for recognition and rights to the Queen via Princess Margaret in 1972, these movements were relatively new and had yet to become a firmly established way of thinking about Indigenous relations.

Land rights legislation introduced in 1975, for example, began a much more explicit process of separate identification of different Indigenous peoples in Australia, and particularly in northern Australia. Consequently, there was less separation within Indigenous society in 1974 than perhaps exists in contemporary Darwin society, as well as less separation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Professor Larkin notes, for example, that “welcome to country” ceremonies acknowledging Indigenous difference and special attachment to land were essentially non-existent in 1974 but are commonplace today.

It is interesting to note, however, that during the intense development period following Cyclone Tracy, the struggle for Indigenous land rights in Darwin became even more difficult as Indigenous people were largely forgotten or were pushed to one side as the city grew outwards (Day 1994). In 1978 the then minister responsible for land and town planning declared that the Darwin city boundary stretched beyond the actual city limit thereby thwarting any land rights claims. Which, following changes to the Land Rights Act in 1976, cannot be made within a town boundary. In 1978, and following the reconstruction, the then Darwin Mayor Dr Ella Stack invited Australians to visit the new Darwin city which she highlighted was populated by varied people with a lack of racial discrimination. Day (1994) notes, however, that many Indigenous people were still living without proper housing, running water or sewerage at that time.

Physical infrastructure context: Physical infrastructure (roads, hospitals, schools, utilities etc.) was largely shared by the various populations of Darwin, again adding to the sense of a mixed society. Physically, the public spaces were much more confined to the central business district and inner suburbs than they are now. The Casuarina Shopping Centre complex, which now serves as a major public space in the northern suburbs, was only in its first stage of development, and would not reach substantial size until the mid 1980's. The spatial arrangement of public spaces and other infrastructure meant that the population was physically mixed in a wide variety of settings. The lack of separation also flowed through to private infrastructure. One of the key topics of discussion for participants in this research was housing, and the resettlement of people into government housing built or rebuilt after Cyclone Tracy. In the 1970's, almost all housing in Darwin was provided by the government in one form or another – either housing for government workers (who were not expected to stay long enough to justify private housing investment), or public housing for Indigenous and low income people. The housing stock was quite homogeneous both before and after Cyclone Tracy, so people who may have, in other locations, experienced separation based on where they lived or the type of housing they lived in did not have that experience to such an extent in Darwin.

5.2 Census data

Previous analysis of demographic change around the time of Cyclone Tracy has paid little attention to changes in the Indigenous population (see Carson, 2008). Most of the previous analysis has considered the total population of the Northern Territory, rather than specifically the population of Darwin or other areas directly affected by Cyclone Tracy. The Darwin Reconstruction Committee produced a report comparing the population of Darwin in 1974 with that in 1975 (these reports are indexed at http://www.naa.gov.au/Images/cyclone-tracy-3_tcm2-1455.pdf), but those reports did not distinguish between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, or between residents and visitors. Those reports have been previously used to estimate that more than 60%

of the people who left Darwin in the evacuation immediately after the Cyclone did not return (at least before the Commission wound up in 1978).

For this research, we have accessed custom data produced from the 1971 and 1976 Censuses of Population and Housing (via the Australian Bureau of Statistics) which provides information about Indigenous status, age and sex of residents of the Urban Centre of Darwin at those two points in time. The data are limited in that they do not track the movement of people between the two points in time (some limited such data are available, but were too costly to access for this project), and so it is difficult to attribute any demographic changes observed directly to Cyclone Tracy. Nonetheless, aspects of the Indigenous experience of Cyclone Tracy may be revealed by demographic change over this period, and by comparing Indigenous demographic change with non-Indigenous demographic change in Darwin. There may also be some insights from comparing Indigenous demographic change in Darwin with Indigenous demographic change in the rest of the Northern Territory.

Census data provide a far from perfect record of populations (especially Indigenous populations) in the Northern Territory at this time. Even in the 2006 Census, there was an estimated undercount of Indigenous people in the Northern Territory of around 20%. At the time of the Censuses consulted here (1971 and 1976), the methods for effective enumeration of Indigenous people were less well developed than they are today. There were significant issues around willingness to identify as Indigenous, enumeration of people who were sleeping rough or in town camps, and the reluctance of Indigenous people to answer some questions. Nevertheless, Census data remain the most comprehensive source of statistical information for the time period given that the coverage of the Register of Wards was more and more limited after the 1950s, and that identification of Indigenous people in other administrative data sets was not common right up until the 1990s.

The aim of this analysis was to compare age and sex distributions of the populations of interest in 1971 with distributions for the corresponding populations in 1976. Due to the small size of the Indigenous population (fewer than 2500 people identified as Indigenous in Darwin in either Census), the analysis has used broad 'lifecycle' age groupings rather than the single year, five year, or even ten year age categories common for this sort of work. The lifecycle groupings were developed based on understandings of non-Indigenous ageing (see Martel *et al.*, 2011 for an example of their application) and are typically labelled:

- Children (aged 0 – 14 years)
- Young adults (aged 15 – 29 years)
- Early middle life adults (aged 30 – 44 years)
- Later middle life adults (aged 45 – 64 years)
- Older adults (aged 65 years and over)

Indigenous populations experience ageing differently to non-Indigenous populations in Australia (Cotter *et al.*, 2007) so these groupings and labels may not be completely appropriate. Nonetheless, they are used here as a convenient age grouping. Note also that there were very few Indigenous people aged 65 years and over in either 1971 (38 people) or 1976 (23 people) so much of the analysis combines the older two age groupings listed above.

At the 1971 Census, 2275 Indigenous people were counted in Darwin. This represented 6.5% of the Darwin population, and it was 9.7% of the total Indigenous population of the Northern Territory. The Indigenous population was much younger

than the non-Indigenous population, with 45% aged less than 15 years of age compared with 33% of non-Indigenous people. Conversely, only 8% of the Indigenous population was aged 45 years or more compared with 13% of the non-Indigenous population. The Indigenous sex ratio was 103 males for every 100 females, while the non-Indigenous sex ratio was 118 males for every 100 females.

In 1976, 2,418 Indigenous people were counted in Darwin. This represented 5.9% of the Darwin population, and it was 10.2% of the total Indigenous population of the Northern Territory. The Indigenous population continued to be much younger than the non-Indigenous population, with 45% aged younger than 15 years compared with 30%. Just 8% of Indigenous people were aged 45 years and over compared with 14% of the non-Indigenous population. The Indigenous sex ratio was 103 men for every 100 women, and the non-Indigenous sex ratio was 120 men for every 100 women.

The rate of growth of the Indigenous population between 1971 and 1976 was 6.3%, which represents the lowest intercensal growth rate for any period since. Conversely, the total population of Darwin grew by 17% between 1971 and 1976, and only the intercensal periods 1976-81 and 1981-86 have had higher rates of growth since.

The noteworthy changes in the structure of the Indigenous population between 1971 and 1976 were a proportional loss of people aged 30-44 years (loss of 2.2%). This loss was most keenly felt in the male population (loss of 3.7%). The growth in the population was evenly distributed among the other age groups, although a slightly larger proportion of growth occurred in the male 45-64 years age category (about 2%) than in other male age categories (which were around 1–1.5% growth). The changing age structure of the Indigenous population of Darwin is shown in Figure 1. In contrast, the non-Indigenous population had a proportional loss of 2.8% in the population aged less than 15 years. Neither males nor females experienced larger decline, and the compensation was across all other age groups. As a consequence of the changes in the Indigenous population, there were just 91 males for every 100 females in the 30-44 year age group in 1976, where there had been 112 males for every 100 females in that age group in 1971.

The Indigenous population of the remainder of the Northern Territory also experienced slow growth between 1971 and 1976 Censuses (1%) when compared with growth rates since (an average of 20% each intercensal period). However, the patterns of ageing and gendering were very different to what was experienced in Darwin. There was a proportional growth in the young adult population (2.7%) and declines in the older age groups (around 1–1.5%). There were no substantial differences in demographic change patterns of males and females.

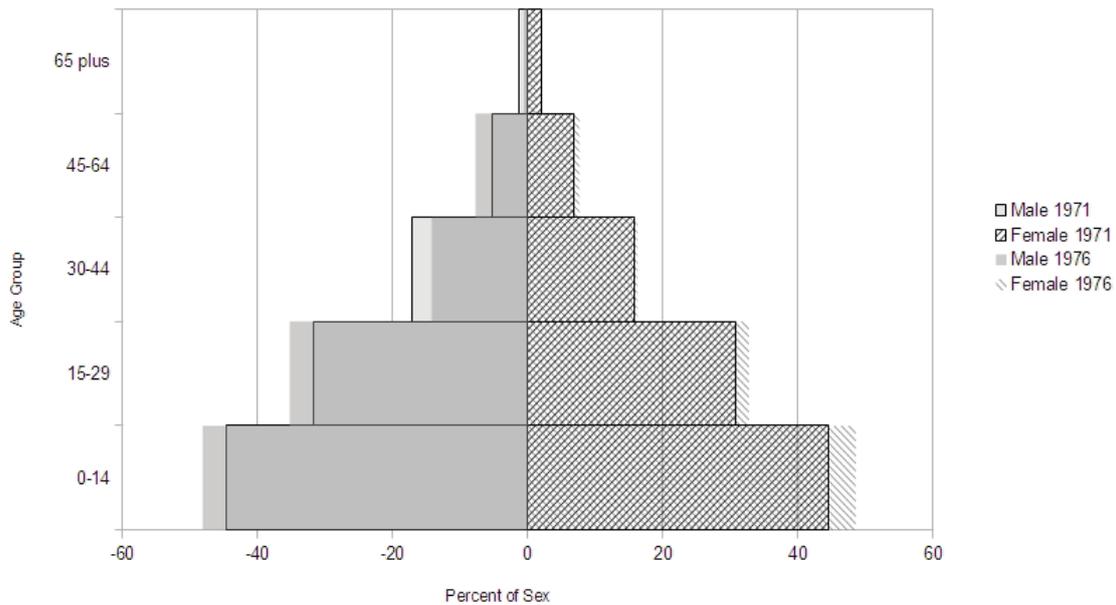


Figure 1. Change in age structure of the Indigenous population in Darwin Between 1971 and 1976.

It is difficult to make any specific attributions to the impacts of Cyclone Tracy on Indigenous demographic change in Darwin around this period. While the Indigenous population 'recovery' took a very different path to that of the non-Indigenous population (slower post-cyclone growth rates, loss of males in the early mid life age group), the slow growth rate at least was reflective of what was happening across the Northern Territory as a whole. This was a period where Indigenous population growth was generally slower than it has been since as a result of low life expectancies and because the dramatic increase in people's propensity to identify as Indigenous that has characterised recent times was still two decades into the future. The limited Census data we have available does not allow us to track what might have happened to the 'missing' 30-44 year old males – whether they migrated away from Darwin, failed to migrate back after the cyclone, or were perhaps unrecorded deaths from the cyclone. It would be possible to access additional custom data from 1976 to get some estimate of migration rates, but doing so was beyond the financial resources of this project, and there are concerns about how well Censuses of that time (and even contemporary times) were able to document Indigenous migration (see Taylor *et al.*, 2011). While there is the accepted wisdom that most non-Indigenous people who left Darwin in the post-cyclone evacuation failed to return, the picture around Indigenous outmigration / return migration is far less clear.

6. INDIGENOUS EXPERIENCE OF CYCLONE TRACY IN DARWIN

6.1 Demographics of respondents

In total, the report analyses 37 people's experience of Cyclone Tracy in Darwin. This includes 25 people interviewed in April and May 2011 (Table 5) and 12 transcripts (Table 6) from the Oral History Unit at the Northern Territory Archive Service. Overall, we have captured 23 Indigenous people and 14 key government officials / NGO's experience of Cyclone Tracy.

Table 5. Demographic details of respondents interviewed in April and May 2011.

Interview #	Name	Age in 1974	Other relevant info.
1	Shelly Hampton	9 years	Indigenous, mother was in Retta Dixon Home and learnt about cyclones.
2	Donna Jackson	4 years	Indigenous - Larrakia. Lived on Lakeside Drive.
3	Charlie King	23 years	Indigenous, born in Alice Springs moved with family to Darwin in 1966
4	Helen Cubillio	Mother – early 30's	Indigenous family - youngest 4 oldest 13. At the time of Cyclone Tracy they lived in the Narrows. Interviewed together.
5	Gregory Cubillio	Father – early 30's	
6	Rosetta Smith	Daughter ~ 8 years	
7	Tanya Williams	13 years	Indigenous - mother Larrakia, father born in West Arnhem Land. Family of 9 living in Stewart Park.
8	Alan McEwen,	19 years	Non-Indigenous, senior hospital employee.
9	Alma Cadell	35 years	Indigenous, lived in Millner, Rapid Creek. Mother to 5 children during Cyclone Tracy.
10	Rawton Williams	46 years	Non-Indigenous, worked for Aboriginal Affairs, Education and Training. European heritage. Married to an Indigenous lady born in the NT.
11	Shirley Cussens,	27 years	Indigenous. Mother of 1 son during Cyclone Tracy.
12	Rose Damaso	32 years	Indigenous. Mother to three young daughters during Cyclone Tracy.
13	Alfred Calma	21 years	Indigenous. Lived in Millner.
14	Maureen Reiter	36 years with 3 children	Non- Indigenous nurses at the hospital during Cyclone Tracy, both continue to work at the hospital. Interviewed together.
15	Liz Maunder	31 years with 2 young children	
16	Graham McMahon	37 years	Non-Indigenous, had been a sergeant first class in the NT police. Retired from police force in 1970. Largely responsible for generating the political momentum for the creation of Kakadu National Park.
17	Graham Maunder	34 years	Non- Indigenous. Interviewed with Graham McMahon
18	Regina Calma,	23 years	Indigenous sisters interviewed together. Lived on Trawl Road, Malak.
19	Lola McGorm	21 years	
20	Lois Young	16 years	
21	Mona Adams	47 years	Indigenous, lived in Rapid Creek.
22	Rayelene Graham	Early 30's. Originally from Alice Springs.	Indigenous. Working as hospital ward maids at the time of Cyclone Tracy. Interviewed together.
23	Netta Cahill	Early 30's. Children 9 and 6	
24	Wendy Espie	Early 30's.	
25	Anonymous	Early 40's.	Indigenous, Director of Aboriginal Legal Aid Service (retired).

Table 6. Demographic details of selected interviewees from the Oral History Unit at the Northern Territory Archive Service.

Transcript #	Year of interview	Interviewee	Age in 1974	Other
NTRS 226: TS391	1984	Peter Talbot	44	Indigenous, born to Territory-born part-Indigenous parents and was working for Darwin City Council at the time of Cyclone Tracy.
NTRS 226: TS429-2	1982	Dolly Bonson	81	Indigenous, born to an Indigenous mother and European father, Dolly Bonson was the Aboriginal servant girl, Bett Bett, featured in 'We of the Never-Never' and the lead character in 'The Little Black Princess' books by Jeannie Gunn.
NTRS 226: TS451	1987	David McCann	40	Non-Indigenous, came to Darwin in 1970. He was Chief Magistrate at the time of Cyclone Tracy and acted as Coroner after.
NTRS 226: TS458	1987	Air Commodore David Hitchins	51	Non-Indigenous, was in charge of the RAAF Base in Darwin from the end of 1972 until 1975.
NTRS 226: TS563	1988	Victor Villaflor	57	Indigenous, born in Darwin in 1917 and adopted and raised by a family of Portuguese origin. Worked on the clean-up after Cyclone Tracy although he was officially on leave from the Public Works Department.
NTRS 226: TS675	1991	Ray Wilkie	49	Non-Indigenous, came to Darwin in 1971 and was the NT Regional Director of the BOM at the time of Cyclone Tracy.
NTRS 226: TS750	1993	Michael Ivory	49	Non-Indigenous, came to Darwin in 1957 and was working with the Welfare Branch at the time of Cyclone Tracy.
NTRS 226: TS781	1994	Les Liddell	n/a	Non-Indigenous, moved to Tennant Creek in 1966. He played a significant role in the establishment of the Emergency Services and assisting the evacuees from Darwin after Cyclone Tracy.
NTRS 226: TS917	1995	Hedley Beare	42	Non-Indigenous, came to the NT in 1972 to supervise the disengagement of the SA Education Department commitment to the NT. He was instrumental in the evacuation of Darwin after Cyclone Tracy.
NTRS 226: TS1119	2003	Bill Wilson	33	Non-Indigenous, came to Darwin as a police recruit in 1969.
NTRS 226: TS1248	2008	Shirley Collins	36	Indigenous, her mother Shirley Anne Collins' father was John Rikhard Baird and mother Bridget Johnson who was born in Borroloola - she was part of the stolen generation.
NTRS 2366: TS7909	1975	Major-General Alan Stretton	52	Non-Indigenous, head of the Natural Disasters Organisation in Canberra when Cyclone Tracy hit Darwin.

6.2 Experience of past cyclones, warnings, risk awareness and preparedness

When asked about whether or not they received warnings about Cyclone Tracy many people replied that they were taken unaware mostly because of the Christmas celebrations: "*Too busy celebrating* (Talbot, 1984; p. 60)." Despite some Indigenous interviewees reporting that they had experienced the 1937 cyclone in Darwin.

Many of the Indigenous respondents discussed very conventional warnings and reactions to the cyclone, which mirrored the non-Indigenous accounts. "*It was*

Christmas Eve when I became aware of it. I was wrapping up Christmas for Christmas Day....everyone had gone to sleep (Respondent 12)."

"...we heard about the cyclone coming on the radio but I didn't think much of it as I had five kids to look after so I didn't think about the cyclone much...Every year you hear cyclones coming and we don't take any notice because Darwin is a cyclone city...(Respondent 9)."

"We made no real preparation...The only information I think we were given was the best place to go would be the bathroom if the house starts to break up. So that's what we thought we would do the whole 9 or 10 of us (Respondent 3)."

"...my partner came and took me, he was worried and my baby was just turned one so he took me down to his aunties 'cos she had a house of brick (Respondent 18)."

"...we didn't go nowhere. They didn't tell us where to go. Everybody – the police or anybody – didn't tell us where to go. We all stopped in the house, every one of us stopped in the house. Everybody in Darwin stopped in the house (Villaflor, 1988; p. 2 (T2))."

"I always took notice, to say get things ready with the torches and the food and water. Particularly that year there was many warnings...well there was but no one was listening 'cos they was all busy with Christmas time. Nobody was listening to radios (Respondent 4)."

Mrs Dolly Bonson, who passed in 1988 at the age of 95 (Alan H., 2011) had experienced several cyclones in Darwin, but none as horrific as Cyclone Tracy. *"They were warning us, you know, warning us that – to be careful, and oh, there were the big parties...(Bonson, 1982; p. 33)."*

Mrs Bonson continued: *"...too much parties they had, you know, they were not thinking about – they're warning them, you know, that this was coming; I don't think they believe it; we never thought we were going to be like that (Bonson, 1982; p. 35)."*

A key government official commented: *"All the advice on the broadcasts was: 'Fill your bath with water' and do this and do that and do the other thing. Well, nobody does those sorts of things because it's never going to happen to them (McCann, 1987; p. 63)."*

Interestingly, it appears that key government officials (temporary residents) were not over-saturated with warnings like permanent Indigenous residents were and that they may have taken more responsibility to prepare themselves for the cyclone. An official who had been living in Darwin for almost three years commented: *"Now there'd been a scare – a cyclone [Cyclone Selma] that was threatening to come into Darwin about two weeks prior to Tracy.....my wife and family did the taping-up of the windows, and the preparation for the cyclone (Beare, 1995; DAT 1. p. 2)."*

Bill Wilson was a Sergeant Instructor at the Darwin Police College at the time of Tracy, and describes hearing about the Cyclone Warning during an end of term party. Although the party continued, Bill discusses that some preparations were made: *"I know that people have been very critical of Darwin people at the time, for not making preparations. I'm not sure that is fully justified...we did actually go around the training centre and look at what we could do, and decided that what we could do had been done. Now our preparations were pathetically inadequate, but that's with the benefit of*

hindsight...we knew the cyclone was going to bring wind and perhaps some rain. That's about as much as anybody knew...(Wilson, 2003; Tape 9, p. 1)."

Cyclone Selma threatened Darwin a few weeks before Cyclone Tracy and a cyclone warning was issued. *"But that one [Cyclone Selma] didn't eventuate. And in some respects, it gave Darwinians a false hope, because they'd already had one of these scares, and when Tracy was coming they thought it would be the same (Beare, 1995; DAT 1, p. 3)."* In comparison, a local Indigenous man who was born in Darwin in 1930 and had experienced the 1937 cyclone stated *"...we had that many warning practice that you never took much notice of it (Talbot, 1984; p. 63)."*

Ray Wilkie, who was the Regional Director of the BOM in the Northern Territory believed *"that might have been crying wolf for a little bit, when you go back and know what happened after Cyclone Tracy, because they'd say: 'Oh well there's another one of those' (Wilkie, 1991; p. 7 (T1))."*

This was confirmed by many: *"because there'd been, apparently there'd been several cyclones just before and apparently there'd been some false alarms just beforehand, there'd been a couple of lows that had come and gone and so people had got a bit complacent. And I remember we had all this grog on the kitchen table and presents and stuff, and so we weren't really prepared at all. And I think a lot of people got caught out too because it was Christmas Eve as well, I suppose (Respondent 2)."*

One Indigenous respondent recounted how his non-Indigenous employer had taken the approaching cyclone very seriously when many others had not. *"I was the foreman of the [building importers] yard, and the manager called me for a meeting early in the morning and he said 'look, it's likely that this cyclone's actually going to come to Darwin. It's going to hit us at some point, so what we need to do is start battening everything down today.' Though we had contracts that we should have been working on he said 'don't worry about any of that, just make sure everything is sort of battened down'...the rain was getting just heavier and heavier and so he said: 'I reckon you have to knock the men off, you know, send them home, because this is not looking very good.' I don't know where he got all this information from. We knew nothing about cyclones, patterns of cyclones or whatever, just accepted whatever he was saying. But he said he was nervous...It was going to hit the tip and it was going to hit us, so 'knock the men off at lunchtime and just make sure everything is battened down and we'll shut up shop' (Respondent 3)."*

One official commented: *"Well, I suppose, we were well-briefed in the Northern Territory about what to do when a cyclone came. I mean, there were the broadcasts of the signal that you would hear over the radio....So in some respects, the Northern Territory knew what to do in an emergency (Beare, 1995; DAT 1, p. 3)."*

Those who had previously experienced cyclones in the NT were also aware of the damage and danger that could be inflicted. *"Mum said it was a very big storm. She had experience with her first one when she was in the Retta Dixon home as a young girl. So she had firsthand experience of a cyclone. Even though the first one that hit wasn't very big but it was enough to scare them and get an understanding that these things were quite serious...they were listening to the radio...Mum just warned us on the day and said that we're going to be in a storm tonight and we've gotta be ready (Respondent 1)."*

However, as is clear from the interviews and stated by one official, no one had any concept of the kind of physical damage that would eventuate from Cyclone Tracy: *"...I don't think anything could prepare you for Tracy. I mean, it just went off the end of the*

scale (Beare, 1995; DAT 1, p. 3).” Another official noted that: “...I think from the first warning, as soon as I saw that skyline I realised that everybody was in trouble (McCann, 1987; p. 84).”

6.3 Traditional cultural knowledge /natural warnings

Hilda Muir discussed in her book (Muir, 2004) that Aboriginal people had picked up on the natural warning signs and realised that a ‘big storm’ was coming in December 1974: “*They could tell, from the birds. A lot of Aboriginal people went down the track, out of Darwin. They saw the real warning, just before the big black clouds came rolling in over the Arafura Sea* (Muir, 2004; p. 99).”

Similarly, a number of Indigenous and non-Indigenous interviewees discussed how there were natural signs in the environment that Indigenous people picked up on, reacted to and became quite frightened by. “*I know that a lot of the traditional mob they actually left because they were reading the weather signs and the warnings from the animals and things like that. But I do know a lot of people that died because they were never given the warning. Or they couldn’t understand* (Respondent 1).”

“*The strangest thing was that there was no birds around, nothing and it was broad daylight and no birds nothing. My mum used to hear them every morning. She would get up at 4.30 with my dad...that particular evening about 6.30 there was more changes, it started off still, too still and my mother knew that and she had that feeling she just knew. From my experience of older people I believe them, my mother knew that something was going to happen tonight and blow me down the wind started picking up* (Respondent 7).”

Other Indigenous respondents also talked about the absence of birds as well as the unusual behaviour of green ants. However, changes in nature and wildlife were noted by non-Indigenous respondents as well: “*the evening before all these flying foxes came over our house from east point and they all flew off towards the airport just hundreds of them so many of them. Also the Aboriginal people all knew the cyclone was coming, I’m sure of it...They all talk about the mango’s having a long stem. I would imagine a lot of the Aboriginal folks would have left town and gone back to their homelands* (Respondent 15).”

Indigenous people also associate rainbow serpents with cyclones. Prior to Cyclone Tracy, “*in September or something...there was an unknown creature spotted around Mandorah that was described as a rainbow serpent by non-Aboriginal fisherman and there were several sightings, so when I read that [see Text Box 1] and understood that connection...I was a bit older...I realised that to me that was a precursor warning...And where it was seen is a part of a rainbow serpent dreaming track that goes from Casuarina Beach to Mandorah. So the fact that it was seen along the dreaming track, just before the cyclone, to me is quite significant* (Respondent 2).

Text Box 1. The Mandorah Monster

The Mandorah Monster, described as a sea serpent or giant manta ray (and a close cousin of the Loch Ness Monster), is thought to live in Darwin Harbour. Although sightings are rare, the beast made several appearances before Cyclone Tracy hit Darwin in 1974. According to the Northern Territory News, five local residents independently described eye-witness accounts of what they saw (Cain, 2001). Each sighting occurred in the same place, all were in reasonable light conditions in the late afternoon to early evening and each described the colour of the creature as a drab

olive green.

6.4 Loss of cultural knowledge and identity

A number of Indigenous respondents discussed their detachment from their Indigenous heritage and culture. They felt that they had integrated into Darwin 'city life' (Text Box 2). They therefore did not recognise any signs in the environment and in some cases had learnt what to look out for since Tracy.

Text Box 2. Three sisters discussing their detachment from their Aboriginal heritage

Respondent 19: *"I think things is a little bit different now...us being Aboriginals...there is more black power kind of thing... different to how we grew up."*

Respondent 18: *"Now you got all these other people telling you do this and that, 'cos you are Aboriginal you are entitled to this and that, you know we weren't brought up like that. Our parents were taken away [as part of the Stolen Generation] but they never blamed anyone, never blamed anyone for being taken away, like some other people do now. They were happy for being taken away 'cos they say 'where would we be today, we wouldn't have had all our kids, our parents wouldn't have had our children or our grandchildren now' some people they got different ideas, I don't know. We don't worry about our land..."*

Respondent 18: *"We haven't been back there, we know we got family there but we haven't been back to demand our land and all that not like some people do."*

Respondent 20: *"We are too much like city slickers."*

Respondent 19: *"Yeah we like city life."*

Respondent 18: *"Yeah and I don't like camping anyway, I like my bed [all agree and laugh]...The only place we go back to is over to the island, where our parents grew up, Garden Point. The only place we go back that we call home."*

Respondent 19: *"Yeah Tiwi Islands it is called now, Catholic Mission used to run it when our parents were sent there. Only place we kept going back."*

Respondent 20: *"That's what we call home."*

Respondent 19: *"That's what mum and dad call home too, that's the only home they know."*

Interviewer: *"Saying all of that though if say your parents had grown up with their family they would have known about the cyclone more been able to take notice of signs in the environment and things like that?"*

Respondent 19: *"Most probably if they had been with their Aboriginal family, yeah. 'Cos they reckon these Aboriginals knew that's why they all went, they knew, they were saying something about the mango it was a little bit longer, hanging..."*

Interviewer: *"Did you hear anything like that yourselves before the cyclone?"*

All: *"No, no, we heard about it on the wireless."*

Respondent 20: *"They were saying the Aboriginals all knew."*

Respondent 18: *"They were saying the birds all went too you know. So now we know we listen for the birds, if they go quiet we know something is going to happen. But before we didn't know anything about our Aboriginal culture really... We grew up Catholic that's all we knew..."*

Respondent 18: *'Our mum's mum is Aboriginal and from Daly River.'*

Interviewer: *"Did your grandmother pass on any information like if a cyclone is coming?"*

ALL: *"Oh no, no."*

Respondent 18: *"She didn't teach us anything, We learnt more from mum and dad and going to the island. Not that I like it, I'm not a bush lady."*

Another group of interviewees (Text Box 3) recounted how an Indigenous person had come into the hospital, where they worked, a few days before Tracy to warn them. Although they believed him, because of their integration into western culture, they considered that the 'white man' knows better.

Text Box 3. Group of Indigenous respondents discussing a warning they received from an Aboriginal man, which, because of their integration into Western society, they ignored.

Respondent 23: *"But you know the Aboriginals knew that there was going to be a big wind and rain and Darwin was going to be wiped out. They came and warned us to get prepared. They came to the hospital. I was working at the hospital. And you know because they think full-bloods³ don't know nothing, the blacks know nothing. They laughed it off and said 'Oh nothing's going to happen.' 'Well we're Going!' And you know what? Most of them full-blood Aboriginals went. They went inland."*

Respondent 24: *"A few days before the cyclone. He just walked in out of nowhere eh?"*

Respondent 22: *"Yes. He was like a messenger from the Lord or somebody you know warning us what's going to happen?"*

Respondent 24: *"'Cos he came in and he said to our boss 'Old lady' you know 'you'd better go away. Big wind and rain...no it's going to all come.' And then what's her name our boss turned round and said 'Oh no we can just go early. You know like everything else. No birds no ants. You watch the ants. Well Tracy hit us alright."*

Respondent 23: *"I really believed him you know but being of mixed education you know I thought 'Oh the white man knows better' but no the full-blood knew more."*

Respondent 24: *"You have to watch them they are the closest to nature."*

Respondent 4 also discussed the fact that more traditional Indigenous people would have had more of a sense of the advancing cyclone, but because of her separation from them – she considered that she was on her own and she did not pick up on the warning signs. *"We thought that a lot more Aboriginal people would be dead, but because they would have had more of a sense of there's going to be [a*

³ Many Indigenous and non-Indigenous interviewees differentiated between those who were full-blood Indigenous and those who were part Indigenous. A respondent stated: *"Well you have to characterise Aboriginal people as being either full-bloods or part Aboriginals. And when I went to school up here, part Aboriginals were called half-caste and if you called them Aboriginal they'd want to fight you. Because that was a derogatory term 'I'm not Aboriginal, I'm half-caste' whereas today, they view themselves as being Aboriginal. And a half-caste or quarter-caste isn't spoken of much (Respondent 8)."* Another noted: *"Remember when we say Aboriginals we mean the full-bloods...not the ones who have lived among us...An Aboriginal calls himself a black fella, a coloured person is a yellow fella and we are white fellas (Respondent 16)."* We therefore use the terms Indigenous to mean full or part Aboriginal and full-blood Aboriginal to mean just that, when necessary.

cyclone]... *There would be the traditional ones...that would know. Because this was how they survived way back whenever. But at that time, I wouldn't know...whether the birds were leaving; or this is happening; or the skies were extra red* (Respondent 4)."

In comparison, Respondent 23 reported that her mother warned her that Cyclone Tracy was coming and that she should pack her things and go to Alice Springs. "*She wasn't full-blood, she was a half-caste. But she was very close to nature* (Respondent 23)." According to the respondent, her mother understood that Darwin frequently experiences the tail-end of cyclones and not much happens, but this time, she believed it would be different. "*...she said 'well I'm warning you, you'd better come.' But I ignored her, like everyone else, ignored the warnings. She went...I didn't want to go. Because we'd already been in a few wet seasons in Darwin, worse than Alice Springs, and nothing had happened. Big rains and that was it...Oh she did say 'watch the Aborigines'. She said 'when they leave, you leave'. And I still didn't take any notice* (Respondent 23)."

Similarly, Respondent 25 noted that the mango tree had seven fronds instead of the usual five. He realised that this would be seen by the Aboriginal community as indicative of a strong wind or storm. Nevertheless, he did not make any particular preparations for the cyclone and continued with his plans to spend Christmas in Brisbane.

In spite of all the evidence, not all non-Indigenous people were convinced about Indigenous people's ability to read the natural warning signs. Based on the fact that the Indigenous people in their neighbouring community of Bagot all remained during Cyclone Tracy, they believed that "*was a rumour that went around 'all the birds went, the green ants disappeared somewhere'* (Respondent 16)" and "*the birds and the ants got blown away **during** the cyclone* (Respondent 17)."

6.5 Indigenous people at risk

Several respondents noted that itinerant Indigenous people were more exposed as they were on foot and didn't have shelter or access to official warnings: "*I mean there would have been a couple of hundred people living in the long grass⁴, you know...they had nowhere to go. I mean where do they go? They were on foot. They didn't have cars or anything. These were the people like they are now, they are itinerants...they're not listening to the radio. Nobody is telling them that this massive thing [big storm off the coast] is building, so I mean they wouldn't have any special sense to know this is going to form into a cyclone* (Respondent 3)."

Respondent 3 does note, however, that Indigenous people acknowledge changes in the environment that signify an impending cyclone and that he recognises some of these signs himself. Nevertheless, the respondent stated that these signs may not have appeared, or been noted, with enough lead time for those who were on foot to evacuate far enough inland prior to Cyclone Tracy. This is verified by many of those interviewed who discussed environmental changes occurring only on the morning of the 24 December 1974.

Late observations also occurred through the official modes of prediction. Ray Wilkie, who was the NT Regional Director of the BOM at the time of Cyclone Tracy, stated that although they had been watching Cyclone Tracy form from the 21 December: "*it looked*

⁴ The term 'long grass' refers to homeless people, predominantly Aboriginal, living in the long grass on the outskirts of Darwin.

a rather innocuous sort of thing on the weather chart; it was very, very small... (Wilkie, 1991; p. 11 (T1))”, it was not until 7am on 24 December that they realised it would impact Darwin.

It was noted that although the number of itinerant Aboriginals living in Darwin was a smaller number in 1974 they were definitely still around: *“there were little camps here there and everywhere...in the railway yards, through all this area here and the back of Bagot. All around the place...there is more today than there would have been then (Respondent 16).”*

6.6 Experience of the event

Many Indigenous and non-Indigenous respondents told similar stories of how they sheltered from the cyclone in their home. Some sheltered in the bathroom, some in a bedroom and others moved from upstairs to downstairs as the eye passed over or as the rest of the house disintegrated around them.

“I said ‘come on. We’re all going to the bathroom’...and we was all panicking...we felt that the bathroom was safer... little corner. And we got into the tub and put a mattress over our head in case things fell down...it was a horrible feeling, and we could hear the thing...the roofs falling off, you know, being taken off...so we all waited there til the next morning, all cramped up in the bathtub. We weren’t, you know, game, to look out til later (Respondent 23).”

“...we waited in the laundry, when it did come you could hear all the windows smashing, just like someone was hitting it. Then it was roaring, it was really loud, it was deafening (Respondent 11).”

“There was an old house next door it was like a shack actually. And at one point that collapsed and that really frightened me and that’s when I thought ‘oh God, we’re next’ (Respondent 1).”

“We didn’t know what to do. And one bloke was there he was in a cyclone before so he was telling us what was going to happen...He was explaining that, what’s going to happen, ‘it’s going to get rough and then calm and then rough.’ And we ended up around the toilets. The strongest part of the house, that’s what he said anyway. So we was there, all of us, cramped in the little space near the toilet. We spent the rest of the morning there until daylight (Respondent 13).”

“When it was coming the wind was horrible and the rain... in the eye my mum wanted us to go to the shed underneath. Dad kept saying no. That was lucky because that was all caved in and we would have all been dead. Then all the walls went and dad took us to the passage way and opened the back door...and then when the eye came we went down then, and there was a table there and we stayed underneath there. There was about 8 of us (Respondent 19).”

Another respondent also described hiding under a table: *“My father got us all under the table and wherever that table went we had to crawl with it and that table actually saved our lives, our house wasn’t blown away but there was a lot of damage. The saddest moment for me was that people were screaming around us: ‘Help!’ It’s bringing a lot of memories back for me and I’m getting a little emotional...I can remember the water up to here. I remember my baby brother on my lap, mum was bleeding, she was hit on the temple and if you see her today she still has the scar (Respondent 7).”*

One Indigenous man recalled sheltering in a railway house with friends. The house was eight foot up in the air on concrete stilts and was supposed to be cyclone proof, however: “*When you’re walking in the building shakes...anybody even walking up the steps, the house shakes* (Villaflor, 1988; p. 2 (T2)).” This house was demolished during Cyclone Tracy but fortunately, those who were sheltering there survived. Similarly, the children living in the Retta Dixon home all survived, according to reports (see Text Box 4), even though some of the cottages were destroyed.

Text Box 4. The Retta Dixon Children’s Home and Cyclone Tracy

The Retta Dixon home was an establishment operated by the Aborigines Inland Mission for Aboriginal children of mixed heritage. It is infamously associated with the stolen generations. The home was located at Bagot reserve, Ludmilla, Darwin. Over its time of operation, original dormitory accommodation, in disused army barracks, evolved into eight cottages. On Christmas eve 1974 there were approximately 50 children within the home, 5 of the 8 cottages were devastated by Cyclone Tracy (Cummings, 1990). There is no record of any deaths or serious injuries. On the 26th of December the Welfare Department transported the children and staff by bus to Batchelor, south of Darwin. A few days later the children were evacuated by plane interstate (Cole, 1977). When they returned to the NT the children were again housed in temporary accommodation at Bachelor, while the Retta Dixon cottages were repaired. The Retta Dixon establishment finally closed in June 1980.

Those who were still attending work parties had to shelter in-place at the Dolphin Hotel when the winds picked up: “*the boss made us all go into the other room and his wife played the piano to try and distract us but that didn’t do any good so we went into a big freezer but all the electricity was off so we had to sit there all night and the boss put a sack of potatoes in the door way so the door wouldn’t shut...There was about 7 or 8 of us* (Respondent 21).” Day (1994) described how some Kulaluk⁵ people also sheltered at the Dolphin Hotel: “*all huddled together moaning dreamtime songs to placate the fury of shrieking wind* (p. 68).”

The instruction to fill the bathtub with water in preparation for the cyclone hindered some families’ ability to shelter: “*we were told to let it [the bath] fill up but it kept filling up and overflowing. So we’d have to pull the plug out every now and then and then put it back in* (Respondent 2).”

Some Darwin residents used festive singing to distract younger family members during the height of the storm: “*the roof kept lifting up on the house. You could see it lift and drop back down again. And so I said to my brother-in-law at the time ‘don’t tell them because they’ll all get so nervous about it, you know, so we’ll just keep that quiet and say nothing about it, you know’. We were singing Christmas carols, and you could hear the crashing noises starting outside* (Respondent 3).”

While some respondents stated that they were aware of not going outside when the eye of the cyclone passed over, others were not: “*it was dead silent so we thought ‘oh that’s good. So hope that’s passed.’ So we went outside to see the boundary fence. It was already damaged and someone yelled out ‘look out, it’s coming back’, and you could hear it. So we flew back in the house and that’s when it slammed the place to pieces. It smashed and banged and roared and carried on. The water went through the place and the house fell apart* (Respondent 4).” Hilda Muir (2004) described it like a Hiroshima bomb.

⁵ An Aboriginal community on a stretch of land along the coast of central Darwin

As the eye was passing, people used the opportunity to find a more secure place to shelter and to use the bathroom: "...mum and dad said ok, this is your chance to go to the toilet and then come straight back (Respondent 1)." Whereas Respondent 23 noted: "they say when it crosses over you've got the winds this side so you shut this window and open that." However, he did not follow this advice.

One respondent described calling out for help to the police but to no avail: "Windows was cracking and the rain was coming down, the wind was blowing and the police was real busy sirens going and we were screaming out to the police but the wind and rain was too much and they were too busy anyway (Respondent 9)."

6.7 Aftermath: Entering a world of total devastation

The Indigenous and non-Indigenous response to the destruction was one of complete shock. One official stated: "About seven o'clock in the morning I thought it was low enough for us to venture out...I stepped out into a world I could never have conceived of. It was almost like stepping onto another planet (Beare, 1995; DAT 1, p. 5)." Whereas one Indigenous man said: "We didn't know what to do, but we lucky to be alive, I was lucky (Talbot, 1984; p. 67)."

"Then I seen the whole of Darwin, wrecked. It was bad hey. I was really shaken when I realised how strong it was. We ended up in town. And in the main street there was this van and bloke taking money from the bank and he dropped a big pile of notes. \$50 notes and I walked passed and kicked it and walked away. 'Cos I thought I had no use for money 'cos it was the end of the world (Respondent 13)."

Several respondents told of their reaction to the natural environment with the absence of birds and other animals and the lack of leaves on the trees: "...my first reaction was to the trees, because you know, a normal tree was gone, it was just a stick or a stump. There was no leaves, it was just barren. It was just totally, just sticks everywhere you looked...it was just dead quiet. It was just deafening, quite horrible actually (Respondent 1)."

Many Indigenous respondents noted how they thought they were the only ones who were going through the disaster, that the storm was very localised in their area or street and in some cases home. Many also discussed the eerie silence and loss of leaves and wildlife. Those who had lived in Darwin their whole lives talked of getting lost as the natural and built environment had completely changed.

"I'd said to my sisters who were by now a terrible mess because they were all wet and messy... their hair, and I said 'You girls will want to start tidying yourselves up because I'll tell you what'll happen, the television cameras are going to come round here – because our roof nearly lifted off but we didn't tell you... And so everyone was saying 'Oh yeah, you know, what are we going to say?' We were thinking that we'd probably copped the brunt of it, you know, that it was us that got more damage than anyone else, you know. Anyway, by the time morning started to lighten up and we walked outside, we were just absolutely stunned. The street was gone, it was just about gone. There were two houses left in the street and we were one of them. And we just could not believe it. And you hear that....I even get emotional now, talking about it....we just stood there and looked at this utter devastation and thought my God, you know. How did we live through that? It was extraordinary (Respondent 3)."

This feeling of localised damage and loss, however, was felt by all groups. As demonstrated by the following quote from Police Sergeant Instructor: "Why did we have

to lose our house? Why are we the only people in Darwin to have lost a house... Why did we have to be the people who've lost a house out of this (Wilson, 2003; Tape 9, p. 6).” He of course felt differently after walking out and witnessing the destruction all over town.

Almost all the respondents discussed their lack of clothes: *“The only thing dry in the house would have been the clothes that we had on. And the area where we had our presents and lucky for us, they were alright, lucky for us our mother had bought us some clothes. So on Christmas Day here we were running around in these brand new bright coloured dresses in, you know, that situation (Respondent 1).”*

“In the morning we got up and had a look around and it was really funny cause the house was all disintegrated, all had flown away, been blown away. And I was thinking ‘God, I’d love a cup of tea.’ But I only had my pyjamas, my nightdress on and pants... the bloke that lived at the back of me...called out ‘cos he was downstairs with all his goods and everything down there. So I went there for a cup of tea and my husband wouldn’t go ‘cos he only had his underpants on. So I said you stay there and starve and me and the kids went down and had a lovely cup of tea. And cakes they had. It was beautiful (Respondent 12).”

Many people intuitively evacuated to the nearest, accessible school. *“We ended up going to the Berrima Primary School. But everything was just flooded. There was no power. Whoever was running the emergency services there, like everyone else was in the same boat, there was nothing we could do. They had candles, tinned milk, basic supplies of food. We had to sleep on top of the desk at the school ‘cos the floors were just flooded with water. No blankets, or pillows. We used garbage bags to protect us from the rain (Respondent 1).”*

One Indigenous interviewee noted how they thought the housing commission buildings stood up to the cyclone comparatively well. *“Ours was a Housing Commission, so we were pretty strong. It was just amazing how the house behind us was a Housing Commission as well, so anything higher was destroyed (Collins, 2008; p. 11).”*

6.7.1 The hospital

The scene at the hospital on 25 December was described as a mess by two Indigenous interviewees: *“they were bringing people in upon blankets, four blokes carrying people in on a blanket. While I was there I counted about four or six they pulled out from the rooms, examining room, they must have been dead because they was covered over (Talbot, 1984; p. 62).”*

“The hospital was completely wrecked. It was in a bad way, the hospital. I went in looking for my sister because she got hurt. So I went into the hospital looking for her and the floor...the water was up over the ankle deep but it was just red blood. And when you walked in you stuck to the ground as you went. And there was nowhere to sit. People were standing. It was like literally 600 people in that out-patients’ foyer (Respondent 4).”

6.7.2 Searching for family

One official noted: *“...it’s an interesting thing I think: because Darwin was a remote settlement and many people had left their families down south, I understand that when a cyclone or a tragedy occurs, you normally check on your immediate family, the extended family, your neighbours, and you go out in concentric circles. Since there weren’t those extended families in Darwin everybody started checking on their friends.*

(Beare, 1995; DAT 1, p. 6).” However, all the Indigenous respondents had family connections in Darwin so therefore, their immediate concern was for the health and well-being of their family.

First thing in the morning, one respondent had to check on her mother: *“go and see if Mum’s alright, you know. So I started running...this was about 6 in the morning...and still the rain was very strong...and I ran and was running and got lost ‘cos you couldn’t find your way anymore because the red house on the corner wasn’t there, or the green fence, so you didn’t quite know where you were, you know... it was a set of flats right next door to them, and the flats had actually collapsed onto the house, onto their house, and I just stopped and I said ‘they’re not going to make it, you know, they’re going to be all dead there’...And I thought ‘Oh my God, what’s happened?’ You know? I walked round the back and there’s my dear old Mum sitting on the back veranda. She’s lit a fire and she’s got the kettle on and she’s making tea (Respondent 3).”*

This respondent’s father, however, lived further out in Howard Springs: *“20 odd kilometres from town...after we’d been around and visited my sister’s place, my brother actually turned up...he said ‘We’ll have to go and check on Dad.’ So we drove out, him and I drove out. We didn’t get a puncture. I can’t believe it. There was so much stuff that was on the road. And we drove all the way from the northern suburbs out to Howard Springs. We got there and we looked for Dad and we couldn’t find him. And I remember having this awful moment when my brother started walking around the yard picking up sheets of iron and looking underneath it...thinking ‘My God, you know, like he’s probably here. He’s probably been...his head’s been chopped off or something.’ We searched and we couldn’t find him anywhere, so we turned around and we drove back to town, but we didn’t know it, but we’d actually passed him when we were going out. He was coming in to look for us... There were 37 of us in our family....not one scratch on one person in 37 (Respondent 3).”*

6.8 Rumours regarding an inaccurate body count and mass graves

Following the cyclone, and due to the high level of devastation, rumours circulated that the death toll was actually higher than the official count. This was particularly the case for itinerant Indigenous people who were largely unaccounted for and were more exposed to the cyclone.

“Yeah, so yeah, I reckon and what’s always been said, there was a lot more deaths, particularly Aboriginal people who weren’t caught up on the census and so may not have been on the records so we don’t know how many people were visiting...but I’ve heard similar stories for hurricanes overseas that they tend to under report the death toll, for whatever reasons. Maybe it was to stop people from being frightened to invest (Respondent 2).”

“I mean we knew a lot of people that lived in the bush and surrounding areas as they do today and we reckon there was a lot more people out there unaccounted for that they just didn’t. They weren’t able to count them. And so when you saw the devastation, and those 60 odd people, there’s no way that only 60 odd people would have died in that. I mean there would have been a couple of hundred people living in the long grass, you know (Respondent 3).”

Darwin’s Chief Magistrate, David McCann acted as Coroner after Cyclone Tracy. During the immediate days, he was well aware that a number of people had been killed and that bodies had been taken to the post office in Casuarina or to Darwin Police

Station, however, he didn't go and see them himself. Instead, he informed people that *"...if you want me for anything I'll be at home (McCann, 1987; p. 61)."*

After the police came out to McCann's house to inform him that there was a problem with burying all the bodies, McCann visited the pathologist who was undertaking the post-mortem examinations. The pathologist was certain that they were able to perform an examination on every person to try to determine the cause of death. However, McCann and Police Commissioner Bill McLaren understood that the bodies had to be buried with haste due to health hazards. The undertaker, John McLean therefore organised for all the bodies to be buried in identifiable graves and that a number of those bodies were exhumed for cremation or reburial elsewhere.

"So that so far as the actual deaths are concerned, there was a record of everybody who died whose bodies were recovered...the police had pretty quickly set up a system for identifying all the people who died and had details of description, photograph, what they were wearing, rings and ornaments and all those sorts of things...There were some difficulties, I think, in identification because they were on their own or other people in the family had moved, or whatever, but I understand that all the bodies were identified (McCann, 1987; p. 62)."

Although it was not recorded with the details of the deceased, a Police Sergeant Instructor noted that *"Some of the bodies had been found in motor vehicles on the streets, a couple had been found in the wreckage of houses (Wilson, 2003; Tape 9, p. 9)."*

McCann admitted that he had not undertaken the role with a focus on the duties of a Coroner and that in hindsight he would take on a different approach and be more actively involved by *"establishing exactly where the bodies were, looking at all of them, looking at exactly what procedure the police had adopted for identification, checking on the extent and the type of medication examination and ensuring about the system of retaining clothes and ornaments (McCann, 1987; p. 63)."* McCann did, however, acknowledge that the police had done quite well in their efforts.

McCann's reflection on procedures is supported by the Police Report on Cyclone Tracy. According to the report (Northern Territory Archives Service, 'no date'), the deceased were taken to the mortuary at Darwin Hospital in the first instance. However, bodies were then stored at the Darwin Police Station as hospital facilities quickly filled. Although body identification and recording processes were established as quickly as possible, the multitude of bodies that were brought into the police station made identification and diagnosis of the cause of death difficult. Due to the lack of refrigerated storage facilities, burial was undertaken as soon as the identification and coronial procedures were complete (see Table 7).

Table 7. Commissioner of Police files (1974-1983) relating to the identification of deceased persons from Cyclone Tracy. Please note: the most recent calculation of fatalities attributed to Cyclone Tracy is 71. This number includes those lost on land and sea and also includes an additional 6 people added by the coroner in 2005.

Police #	Family name	First name	Age	Sex	Ethnicity	Cause of death
1	Hoff	Don	30-33	m		Extensive injury to head. Asphyxia.
2	Wood	Jennifer Ann	36?	f		Pressure marks on body. Crushed asphyxia.
3	Muir	William Daniel (Billie)	adult	m	Aboriginal	Crushed asphyxia.

4	Clark	Susan Rose	Approx 70	f		Lacerations on left arm, skull fracturing.
5	Rennie	Ian Robert	Approx 30	m	Possibly Chinese of Japanese	Asphyxia. Extensive bruising and abrasions.
6	Thompson	Richard	78	m	European	Fractured bones in nose. Lacerations between eyebrows. Lacerations over top of skull. Loss of left lower arm. Cause of death head injuries.
7	Wajanbuk	Bultja	60	m	Aboriginal	Lacerations over head pressure marks on chest. Asphyxia. Was found at Kneechays Lagoon
8	Bruhn	Andrew, Mark	5	m	White	Pressure marks over chest. Horizontal bruising and pressure marks of left neck. Crush asphyxia.
9	Yoshida	Koji	42?		Japanese	Extensive lacerations forehead cheek and chin. Heamatoema of back of head. Fracturing of rib cage.
10	Turner	John	69	m	White.	Bruising and lacerations on arms and hands. Abrasion and bruising over thoracic s.regia (sp?). Asphyxia
11	Lai	O.N, ING	adult	m		
12	Fong Lim	Arthur	adult	m	Chinese or oriental male	Deep laceration on chin and upper arm. Deep lacerations on back of head. Abrasions on left cheek. Cause of death pneumothorax asphyxia.
13	Williams	Kerry Linda	1 year 9 months	f	White	House collapsed. Bruising and lacerations on chest. Asphyxia.
14	Dibua	Charles	26 to 36	m	European	Bruising both arms, pressure marks chest and shoulders. Multiple lacerations and bruising over back. Crush asphyxia.
15	Stephenson	Cherry Leone Rose	adult	f		Crush asphyxia.
16	Burgess	Dean William	2.5 years	m		
17	Chaney	Paul Mark	7 months	m	European	
18	Fenton	Gary Roger	Approx 25	m	White	Asphyxiation of blood.
19	Butler	Louisa Fanny	adult	f	Part Aboriginal	Deep lacerations into muscles, compound fracture left lower tibia and fibia. Traumatic amputation left lower foot. Crush asphyxia.
20	Yu	Frederick Yee Char	25 - 30	m	Chinese	Lacerations through to bone over top of skull. Pressure marks over lower posterior portion of thorax. Asphyxia and cerebral haemorrhage. Wife in hospital, likely due to injuries, evacuated to Sydney.
21	Knox	Elva Dawn	Early 30's	f	European	Lacerations of forehead. Asphyxia.
22	Knox	Michael John	Approx 30	m		Asphyxia. Head extensively bent towards left. Deep lacerations.
23	Stephenson	Kylie Jane	6 months	f	White	Extensively fractured skull.
24	Williams	Molly	31 years	f		House collapsed. Conjenitive (?) asphyxia.
25	Wheatley	Kenneth	3 years	m	White	Stepson of Stephenson.

		James Scott	11 months			Crush asphyxia.
26	Wenck	Shirley	adult	f	White	Wood splinter through lower abdomen and left upper leg. Compound fracture of right femur.
27	James	Reuben Paul	1 month	m	White	Suffocation.
28	James	Richard Roland	30-35	m	White	Crush asphyxia.
29	Clough	Eileen Patricia May	25-26	f	White	Extensive lacerations.
30	Dewar	Peter	adult	m	White	Extensive pressure marks and lacerations. Crush asphyxia. Wife and baby in hospital – may have been injured or in hospital already.
31	Brown	Geraldine Elizabeth	9 years	f	Part Aboriginal	Crush asphyxia. Sheltering under the bed and house collapsed around the family, daughter was crushed under the bed.
32	Harder	Lisa Karown	5.5 months	f		
33	Daffey	Peter Brian	6 years	m	Possibly part Aboriginal	
34	Bell	Malini Palathil	45-50	f	Indian	Loss of blood and pneumothorax.
35	Parker	George Valentine	32	m	European	Wife Madeline Parker in hospital (likely due to injuries) and evacuated to Sydney.
36	Portman	Suzanne Mary	8	f	White	Lacerations of both legs, abdomen and forehead. Cause of death fracturing of frontal squama.
37	Bonner	Cecil Henry	75	m	European	
38	Catton	Kevin Leslie	Approx 40	m	White	
39	Knox	Catherine Michelle	5 months	f		Extensive mud over face. Suffocation.
40	Taylor	John Thomas	25	m	European	Deep laceration of right temple through to bone. Deep laceration and pressure marks over right shoulder, arm and thorax. Crush injuries to head and thorax. Found in an upturned vehicle (sedan).
41	Lang	Dudley (Jack)	Approx 50	m	European	
42	Mecklin	Paul Alaister	36	m	British Australian	Deep lacerations of forehead in region of hairline through to bone. Fracture of bone and exposure of brain. Bones of forehead depressed. Extensive crush injuries to head.
43	Knox	Stephen James	3 years	m	European	Lacerations of forehead. Pressure marks all over body. Extensive crush injuries to neck and trunk. Asphyxia.
44	Hampton	Raymond	35	m	European	Bruising of left lateral chest wall
45	Bloomfield	Dorothy	adult	f		Laceration left cheek asphyxia
46	Holten	Dennis	adult	m	European	Found on beach 28/12/74. Fisherman/sailor.
47	Andrew	Peter				Natural causes.
48	Swann	Robert Gordon				
49	Hanson	Thomas	70	m		

		William				
50	McNabb	Eric Arthur	74	m	White	Died on the 3 of Jan Buried 8.1.75.
51	Smaniotto	Giovanni	70 years	m	Italian	Died on the 1 st of Jan from Broncho-pnuemonia but doctors attribute the death to CT.

Although several officials also stated that they considered the number of deaths from Cyclone Tracy to be remarkably low given the ferocity of the storm, one stated that: *“the number was as accurate as you could do in a disaster zone like that. And we had it being added up each day on the co-ordinating committee, so I don’t think there was any attempt to fudge the figures (Beare, 1995; DAT 2, p. 4).”*

Bill Wilson, who went on to become the Assistant Commissioner of the NT police, stated that there were no mass burials or a cover up and that the official death count was accurate *“I have no reason to doubt the official figures...there was no need to falsify the figures...The government had done nothing wrong that they saw, so why should there be any attempt to hide the figures. Every attempt was made to identify bodies...There was too many people in the know for it to have happened. The police were involved. The hospital people were involved, the Coroner was involved. To suggest that there were mass graves somewhere would’ve involved a conspiracy amongst all those people. So the bodies were centralised, counted, identified or identifying features kept, and the normal process then happened....I saw the records that were being kept. I know the people involved...So my belief is that they are just rumours (Wilson, 2003; Tape 10, p. 11).”*

However, Bill Wilson did go on to discuss that it was possible that there were people, especially the homeless itinerants living in the long grass and the beaches, who were more exposed and may have disappeared and died without being recorded. *“I wouldn’t be surprised if there were more people actually dead. Some of the missing probably were killed, and we’ll never know the whys and wherefores (Wilson, 2003; Tape 10, p. 12).”*

Furthermore, Indigenous people within Darwin who wished to return to their communities outside of Darwin were evacuated *“...the little commuter airway company in the Northern Territory flew some of the Aboriginal people back to their homelands, so it wasn’t always easy to keep tabs on who was there (Beare, 1995; DAT 2, p. 4).”* Overall, however, the low official death count was attributed to the fact that the disaster happened at night when the majority of people were protected indoors rather than any kind of conspiracy.

One Indigenous interviewee recounts his friend’s experience in dealing with burying those that had perished: *“...my gang in the council – there’s 3 of us on the truck – go and putting all the street signs up, repairing curbing and making driveways and all that, doing stone pitching, they were called into the burial party. Because my mate...he was one of them, he was in the burial party. When he went out to the cemetery, there was the police – they just piled them on like sardines, you know; you know them vans, they had them stacked up like that with a tag on their on their foot, but this is what...was telling me, the policeman took – standing – having to pull the body out, had big rubber gloves. They were buried in the clothes they were the night they got killed. Pull them out, just drop them into the grave and there was another policemen there, he took the number of the grave on the headstone.*

As they kept bringing the bodies in for burial, old...seen a couple of friends of his, and that upset him; upset him that much; like Billy Muir and a few other blokes. See on that job we was doing we met a lot of people, you see, driving around down doing jobs here

and there and everywhere, and he seen a lot of people he knew. So it upset him and made him crook. He told the doctor what happened, he was upset, probably shocked too, I suppose. So the doctor put him straight on the first plane, sent him down to Adelaide (Talbot, 1984; p. 64-65)."

6.9 Indigenous people assisting in response and recovery

There are other accounts of part Indigenous people assisting with the emergency operations following the disaster. One man tells of how they collected all the food from his home and a gas cooker and took it to a government building where "...*all the whites and coloured people [were] because they come to the place that was standing (Villaflor, 1988; p. 3 (T2)).*" The part Indigenous man and his friend proceeded to prepare food for everyone but nobody offered to help, nobody wanted to cook, probably because they were all in shock. Following this, he went to gather more food from a local shop where they were giving away groceries and he continued to assist in the following weeks by going back to work with the Department of Works, even though he was on official long-service leave.

Other respondents reported that Indigenous family and friends returned as soon as possible to help as carpenters, electricians, firemen, plumbers, cleaners, distributors of food and clothing, and, in child-care facilities. One respondent stated "*Dad was a jack of all trades, he didn't know how to read or write but he knew how to work. They were all awarded, the men who stayed back. My mum has still got the certificate (Respondent 7).*" A couple of female respondents also discussed coming back very soon to take up necessary service jobs in Darwin. Respondent 22 notes how she came back after five weeks to take up her job at the hospital while her children remained in Alice Springs and Victoria.

"It must be five weeks - yeah, because I got a job at the hospital. Children had to stay away until such time that they rebuilt Darwin...schools and things like that... accommodation...September, that's when schools opened up and when the 3 children were back in... Yeah, so that was a long time without seeing our kids. But I'd get on my four days off and get in the plane and went to Alice to see them and back again in time for work (Respondent 22)."

It was stated that the more traditional Indigenous people did not assist with the clean up: "*It's not their deal, not their deal. They are a different culture, you know dreaming and skins and all that, that is their deal, house is not important...It's a very slow evolution. I've been here since '54, not much difference (Respondent 16).*" However, two accounts listed in the NT archives describe how many traditional Indigenous people provided assistance.

An official with the Emergency Services Department in Tennant Creek who assisted evacuees from Darwin noted that there was little food available in Tennant Creek because the wet season had cut supplies from Mt Isa and Darwin. Therefore, everything had to come from Adelaide. "*The people at Warrabri then went and harvested all their watermelons and rockmelons, and brought that into town as a fruit for the people coming through. I think this was a great gesture too by these people, and I don't know if its ever been recorded...But the people from Warrabri then, they were all Aboriginal, they took no coerced actions to get them to go and do it. They just went and harvested the whole melons and brought them to Tennant Creek – a whole truck load – and said: 'There you are, you need food for the people, here it is (Liddell, 1994; p. 10-*

11).” Also, an Indigenous man acquired a bus in order to transport Indigenous people back to their communities to places like Roper River (Ivory, 1993).

6.10 The involvement of General Stretton, the Army and Navy

Some interviewees recognised the Navy for their significant contributions during the recovery phase of Cyclone Tracy whereas the Army, and General Stretton more specifically, weren’t received in quite the same light. Although people stated that Stretton was compassionate they were critical that as a military officer he didn’t understand “*the civilian way of things very well at all*” and ran the operation too militaristically (Wilson, 2003; Tape 10, p. 6).

“If it happened today it wouldn’t occur; you wouldn’t bring in an outsider. A similar situation would not bring an outsider in to take charge... but of course it was a unique situation. The Assembly had only been elected for something like two months, three months...I think since October 1974...so they were very new. The federal government hardly recognised them... The bureaucrats in Canberra certainly were resisting any form of breakaway by the Territory, and they saw it was very much an opportunity to keep control.... It wouldn’t have happened in one of the states, but the NT was still very much a Commonwealth territory in those days (Wilson, 2003; Tape 10, p. 7-8).”

“...Stretton was aware that if the - - somehow he knew. Intuitively he must have known, that if the community starts to pick itself up its therapeutic to do that...He was simply there as heading a civilian evacuation, and a civilian reconstruction. Now I guess a lot of times he must have been sorely tempted to say: ‘No, let the Army take over.’ (Beare, 1995; DAT 1; p. 15).”

Furthermore, the Cyclone Tracy disaster has been interpreted by many as a last stand for the Canberra government to try and achieve more control over the NT which was beginning to slip away. Their strong control over the response and rebuilding was also perceived as an opportunity for the Labor Government, which was starting to have problems, to win back popularity.

6.11 The evacuation

As would be expected people chose to be evacuated to locations where they had family, had visited previously, or for some who chose Adelaide, because it was the closest location to Darwin that they could go. Everyone had a choice of where they would go, regardless of whether they were Indigenous or not.

6.11.1 The evacuation of Darwin as reported in the transcripts

Interestingly, the oral history transcripts reveal a slightly different story to Stretton’s (1976) account of the management and organisation of the evacuation of Darwin. Ray McHenry was Director of Emergency Services for the Department of the Northern Territory. On Christmas Day afternoon McHenry called a meeting with anybody who was available from the public services. “*We realised it was a disaster where we needed a plan, and I think then and there it was decided that we’d each be detailed off to do things, but that one of the important things - - one of the first important decisions is that we had to get people out of Darwin. I think the decision to evacuate was made not by show of hands but just by a general awareness amongst that group... I mean, Stetton’s book puts it otherwise: he says he made the decision, but in fact it was a consensus that just was - - was **there**. Because we realised that before long there’d be sickness breaking out – there were no medical supplies that you could speak of. The hospital*

worked magnificently around the clock, and some of the surgeons were superb... But we were just lacking things. And of course without electricity the food would start to deteriorate (Beare, 1995; DAT 1, pp. 7-8)."

Many people had already evacuated to the schools if their house had been damaged during the cyclone. The schools were made of brick and they were at ground level and low pitched and had therefore not suffered damage. Because the schools were Hedley Beare's responsibility (see Beare, 1995) McHenry put Beare in charge of the evacuation: "...it was a devastating assignment to be given, because where do you start? You don't even have a telephone. To be quite literal, we didn't even have pencils and paper, and we didn't know who was there, or how many people had survived, or where they were (Beare, 1995; DAT 1, p. 8)". In order to accomplish a swift and successful evacuation a price had to be paid in bureaucratic untidiness as written forms of communication were considered to be too slow (Beare, 1980).

Colleagues commented to Beare: "rather wryly that they began to understand what multi-culturalism was, because racial groups reacted differently. You'd get these hard luck stories – you know someone would come along and say: 'In my country twins are deemed to be a gift from God – I want to put my twins on the aeroplane.' And you'd have to say: 'Well, I'm sorry, there isn't a bus today.' 'Oh, but they must go. Can I walk out to the [airport]?' You know, you'd get these hard stories, and hard sell, because people wanted to get on aeroplanes... We'd made a decision as a co-ordinating committee, Ray McHenry's committee, that women and children should be given priority, and in the early – first five days, a lot of men tried to make the case that they ought to go with their wives or children, or they were a family unit and they needed caring down south (Beare, 1995; DAT 1, p. 11)."

"Many of them were traumatised. And bear in mind all of us have a reality coloured by the experiences we'd gone through, so often times you couldn't have expected rational behaviour out of people. In fact, the adrenalin of getting the city going again was the thing actually that saved a lot of us... But it was true that some people wanted to stay...and had they stayed it would have put a stress on the infrastructure of the city... There was no running water, for example. The sewerage system wasn't working... There was no power. No refrigeration for food. In fact it was dangerous to drink anything. I remember...they came across a cache of beer that had been set aside for the Christmas celebrations, and they were just parcelled out because that was safe to drink, but water was not (Beare, 1995; DAT 1, p. 12)."

"People knew they had to go, wanted to go and yet didn't want to go. People who were staying behind wanted their families to be gone to a better, sort of more comfortable environment, and yet felt very lonely (Wilson, 2003; Tape 10, p. 3)."

"I believe, yes, coercion was put in... not hugely so, but there was an element of it. A lot of people who didn't want to go probably were made to go (Wilson, 2003; Tape 10, p. 5)."

"I reckon it was about the third day you sensed a sort of terror taking people over, because the food was rotting, and somehow their world was rotting, and they felt that they might die... So, I think if the population had been retained it simply would have taxed everything: water, and food in particular. In retrospect - - I mean it's easy to say after the event: 'We should have left people there.' But I don't think we would have survived if that would have been the case (Beare, 1995; DAT 1, p. 13)."

During the evacuation, Beare realised that it was too time consuming to allow the Red Cross to make lists of the evacuees and this contributed to the splitting of families and

associated trauma. In his defence, however, Beare states: *“Unless we got the aeroplanes out of the airport within an hour of first light, they couldn’t get back to Darwin to take a second load out before dark fell (Beare, 1995; p. 14).”* This was considered of utmost importance since the airport terminal and navigation beacons were destroyed during the cyclone.

However, not all officials agreed with the haste in which the evacuation was undertaken. Air Commodore David Hitchins stated that he was infuriated by the disorganisation and chaotic manner in which the evacuation was developing and he therefore, sought to take control: *“I don’t think it would have mattered a damn if it had been done over ten or twelve days and done in a much more organised fashion...Aeroplanes would have been much more economically used and the whole thing would have been a very much better run organisation (Hitchins, 1987; p. 63).”*

“In hindsight, it wasn’t [necessary to evacuate so many people]...at the time I think the thought that the infrastructure wouldn’t cope was quite valid. I think the fear of disease was also quite genuine. It was probably overplayed, but no-one knew at the time... Over the years I’ve come to believe it was wrong. I think it was bad for the morale of the city, as it turns out, and it’s taken a lot longer for people to recover, but that’s with the benefit of hindsight (Wilson, 2003; Tape 10, p. 5).”

Interestingly, and quite controversially, Day noted: *“Whites complained at being administered by methods refined against Aborigines for decades. Told where they could live, separated from spouse or children, needing permits to enter the city, at the mercy of police, politicians and pen-pushers, many cyclone victims decided to leave the devastated city permanently (Day, 1994; p. 71).”*

6.11.2 Aboriginal people evacuated back to their communities

The fact that the Indigenous evacuees were a priority is demonstrated by Bill Wilson, a Sergeant Instructor at the Darwin Police College who was put in charge of evacuating people on the 25th, however, he does note that his recollections may be a day out. *“We sent people out to Alice Springs on a DC-3, and I went to the airport to supervise the loading of the aircraft. I think it only took about twenty three people...it was relatively small... and they were nearly all Aboriginal people. We packed the plane, and that took off (Wilson, 2003).”*

According to Respondent 14 there was a call for all Indigenous people to go to the airport so that they could be flown back to their communities and other respondents talked about how people were evacuated back to their communities. One respondent, however, was of the impression that many of the itinerant Aboriginals would have returned to their communities for Christmas and may not have been in Darwin during Cyclone Tracy.

An official, who worked as a Welfare Branch Officer in Darwin noted that there were a lot of Indigenous people who needed evacuating. Recognising this need one local Indigenous man assumed the responsibility of transporting people back to their communities. *“I know of one Aboriginal man who had a bus...he was transporting people back, say, to places like Roper River (Ivory, 1993; Side A, Tape 3, p. 5-6).”*

A lot of Indigenous people from Bagot community in Darwin, also, evacuated to Ludmilla School because the school had survived the cyclone quite well. *“And they [Indigenous people from Bagot] were there. Of course, there was a bit of food being handed around and they just thought: ‘That’ll do us.’ Nobody objected to that. There*

was blankets and things like that being offered to people, so they thought this was 'bonno'; it was better than being back at Bagot (Ivory, 1993; Side A, Tape 3, p. 6)."

According to one official who worked as a Welfare Branch Officer, many Indigenous people from out of town, who were in town during Cyclone Tracy, also accepted the option of evacuating to the southern states. *"They [Indigenous evacuees] got off the planes, they said: 'We want to go to Sydney.' They couldn't discriminate between them. They were blackfellas who'd never been out of the Territory in their life. And that's where they wound up. Of course, then they had to bring them back again....But they got a free trip out of it, and they were fairly well looked after when they got down there. They were treated the same as everybody else (Ivory, 1993; Side A, Tape 3, p. 6)."*

According to General Stretton, however, the Indigenous people were treated differently. Firstly, a number of people had suggested to Stretton that Indigenous people should be forcibly moved out of the Darwin area, due to health risks. But Stretton refused to follow that advice. *"I informed the minister that as far as I was concerned, in Darwin, everyone was a human being. I didn't care what nationality they were, coloured or anything else, they would all be treated the same (Stretton, 1975; p. 7)."*

Nevertheless, Stretton reports that he did make one exception to the evacuation policy. Considering that those Aboriginals who opted to evacuate to a southern state had most probably never left the Darwin area, Stretton *"modified the regulations in their favour by saying that any Aborigines going south could move in a family group, and they could fly too (Stretton, 1975; p. 7)."* Additionally, Stretton gave Con-Air authorisation to fly others back to their communities around the Darwin area, if that was their choice.

According to all Indigenous respondents in this research, however, none evacuated as a family unit, as discussed in Section 6.11.3. We hypothesise though, that General Stretton was referring to more traditional Indigenous people. This humane gesture was quite surprising since Stretton was adamant on all other aspects of the evacuation. Stretton reports that he had pressure from Greek, Italian and UK officials wanting to arrange specific evacuations for their citizens, yet he refused. As far as Stretton was concerned, he wasn't going to give any group priority over another.

6.11.3 Need or fear to evacuate

Due to severe injuries, some people had to evacuate Darwin immediately: *"they sewed my sister up and I took her home and it was so badly infected that I took her back to one of the medical spots again. They had to pull the stitches out and it just went 'pop'. And it was a powerful stink. It just was so badly infected. So they put her on the first plane and said 'just get out'. Had to get all her kids and get out. We jumped on a Hercules. They tried to keep all the families together, take them to the same place. 'Cos everybody went to different places, but we went to Perth...'Cos we had family over there. And when she got out she went straight into the hospital (Respondent 4)."*

Some were evacuated for other medical reasons: *"my wife was due to have her baby, so she was evacuated within a couple of days. They flew her out. She went to Brisbane...because she was due to have the baby. That was the worry. When we'd left the house, we couldn't all stay in the house because there was no power, nothing (Respondent 3)."*

One of the concerns about evacuating was the unknown – people didn't know if any of their possessions would be there when they returned, or even if Darwin would ever exist again. Another concern was the overcrowding on some of the planes: *"the plane*

we got on, that Hercules...people sitting in the aisles. They had too many people. They had 300 people where they shouldn't have had it (Respondent 24)."

While many people were scared about being evacuated and were a bit reluctant to even though the authorities insisted, some were more than happy to get out: *"we were just that scared we had to go away from Darwin from the cyclone, was happy to get evacuated with my five children (Respondent 9)."*

6.11.4 Scattered families

Even though the authorities in the southern states did their best to keep families together, it was still difficult because everyone was given a choice of where they wanted to go. Some mothers reported that they were split from their children. Their adult children had, however, chosen to go elsewhere. One of the main concerns was that fathers and husbands had to remain in Darwin to help rebuild while mothers, wives and children were sent south, *"to wait, cold and homesick, for permission to return (Day, 1994; p. 69)."* It was also a massive culture shock for many children who had to attend southern schools, stay in foreign places in cold climates and be shifted from one place to the next.

"There were people that we didn't even know [at the Aboriginal hostel]. It was like a boarding thing I don't know. We were the only ones [from Darwin] so it was like, a bit sad. But yeah, poor mum, I don't know how she coped...we didn't see him [dad] for 12 months...we had to do schooling down there and that was like a culture shock for us because it was like...uniforms and a totally new school and it was horrible for me because I didn't want to be there. Trying to adapt to the different studies, different way of life. My older sister, she was fine in high school, she quite liked it. But for me and my other sister, we struggled a bit. I've always been like a shy child and um, having people in your face going 'oh, what happened?' 'What's a cyclone?' It was just too much. So yeah, that sort of pushed me back a little bit (Respondent 1)."

"When we were down south, it was really good to see everything intact, flowers growing, sprinklers on. It was really exciting to see the normal things. And after a couple of weeks we actually forgot about the damage and devastation so we started getting homesick...and the kids saying 'we don't want to go to school here, we want to go.' Because it was Christmas time and they was on holidays so when the school started, they would have to start. But we were living in pretty rough places down there...Because when we first went, we stayed in that army barracks...that's where the majority of the people went at first. Until they had got them a place to go to. That's when we went to the little Seventh Day Adventist camp and wasn't happy because we couldn't eat meat. Then we went to that convent but that's when they were saying 'well school's starting so we've got to work something out. And we wasn't able to stay there when their school started because that's their boarding school. And then we said 'oh no, we don't want to move any more, it's getting like we're in the way so we'll go back' (Respondent 4)."

"My mum was just so worried about Dad...He couldn't contact mum 'cos he didn't know where we were. The NT Government had a list of families and some were not on that list but lucky ours were so that's how my father found us (Respondent 7)."

6.12 Racial issues that arose during the disaster

One Indigenous man reported that when he went to gather food from a local shop where they were giving away groceries the Italian people, *"the eyeties"*, would *"just*

about fight you for everything in the shop, just like they never seen tucker in their life before. They didn't give the other people a chance. Every time they push the groceries out, they just wheel the groceries away (Villaflor, 1988; p. 4 (T2))."

When asked about his impression of how certain ethnic groups were said to have responded differently to others, Beare commented: *"I wouldn't want to be blunt about which groups were which, but it's true. And you could start to almost predict what sort of story you'd get if you realised what ethnic group it was... Actually, my view is that – this is simplistic – that you could have divided the Darwin population into two heaps. One group were those who cared for community, and made huge personal sacrifices to give themselves to the community. They just pitched in, almost careless about their own health – metaphorical as well as literal. And there was a second group that hid. They looked after number one... I know of one public service head who, the morning after the cyclone, put all his belongings in his car, put his family in there, and drove out of town. I can think of people from my office who simply went away, did nothing, and said: 'If Hedley needs me he'll call for me.' I mean, there was no way to call for them... By far, the majority, the huge majority were in that first heap of people who just dug in and tried to help. The sense of neighbourliness, and the willingness to give, was just inordinate (Beare, 1995; DAT 1, p. 11)."*

According to police reports, looting was not considered a prevalent crime after Cyclone Tracy. However, 15 people were arrested in connection with looting during the first 70 hours (Northern Territory Archives Service, 'no date'): *"Looting occurred...there were several instances of looting...a [truck] was stopped on the Barkley Highway and found full of white goods...I think it was two people from the Darwin Greek community... it's unfortunate the Greek community got a bad reputation coming out of Cyclone Tracy...you shouldn't tar the whole community with the actions of a few people...I can only recall, however, two or three instances where it was Greek people (Wilson, 2003; Tape 10, p. 1)."* Also see Text Box 5 for details on an Indigenous man involved in theft after Cyclone Tracy.

Text Box 5. The treatment of Indigenous people in the Magistrates Court

In addition to acting as Coroner, David McCann was instrumental in re-establishing the Magistrates Court, only days after Cyclone Tracy impacted Darwin. While some viewed this as a necessity for reinstating social order and justice, others, including General Stretton, criticised his actions. According to Beare: *"...that was the city reasserting itself, you know: law and order ought to prevail, the courts get going, the magistrate sits on the court and hears a case. Then Stretton, in effect, kyboshed it – or wanted to – because he didn't want the heavy hand to be seen to be operating, I think (Beare, 1995; DAT 1, p. 16)."*

However, Stretton (1976) reports that the Magistrate was in the process of sentencing *"another Aborigine to nine months hard labour for obtaining a bottle of whisky by allegedly impersonating a Police Officer"* (p. 159). Stretton considered this to be victimisation since it was common knowledge that there were no Indigenous Police Officers in the Northern Territory, at that time. Stretton also believed that the penalty of nine months hard labour was *"above the normal power exercised by a magistrate (Stretton, 1976; p. 160)."* Furthermore, the Prime Minister backed Stretton's actions as he was concerned about the apparent harsh treatment of the Indigenous man. Stretton reports that the Prime Minister stated: *"You might be legally wrong, but you are morally and politically right (Stretton, 1976; p. 162)."*

McCann defended his decision regarding the case: *"the facts suggest that he [the accused] had stood over somebody, said he was a police officer, which was part of the*

standing over and using a threat to get liquor. Technically I think it's probably correct that he was seeking to impersonate a police officer. Now that's all very well to say that there were no aboriginal police officers but from the point of view of the person who was being threatened...his blackness or otherwise was really incidental to what was going on (McCann, 1987; p. 73)." McCann also stated that he didn't believe the imposed penalty of nine months to be in excess of the maximum, "*generally we were sentencing people to twelve months or more for various offences (McCann, 1987; p. 74)."*

"That was an example of Stretton going off half-cocked, I believe....It's alright for Stretton in his book to say that everybody knew that you didn't have Aboriginal police in the Territory; it wasn't quite as easy as that, because the people involved were not Aboriginal as they would be recognised...The locals certainly expected serious penalties for people that were caught in these situations...Stretton didn't recognise how the locals felt (Wilson, 2003; Tape 10, p. 7)."

While McCann and others recognised that Stretton was performing a particularly good job in extremely difficult circumstances, McCann believed that Stretton had "*no authority to exercise any power whatever in that Territory. He was a visitor, a tourist as it were (McCann, 1987; p. 70)."* Additionally, McCann thought that the media might have set Stretton up: "*There were a lot of press there and they were looking for a story and they fed him the story that people were getting sentenced without trial and all sorts of things and I think they led him into it. That was the impression I got (McCann, 1987; p. 72)."*

The broader issue of racism was sometimes discussed when respondents were asked about their treatment during and after Cyclone Tracy. One respondent felt that racism among the general population was worse now than it had been in the past "*they treated us better in them days than they do now. Our kids get treated badly now...racism was there but it wasn't as bad, it was mainly the government policies...before the cyclone...the racism was there, I heard a lot from my mother. Before the cyclone it was there but it wasn't as bad as it is today. I find that today its worse (Respondent 7)."*

6.13 Assistance immediately following the cyclone

All participants discussed very positively the assistance received in Darwin immediately following the cyclone and while they were evacuated, in terms of food, clothes, fuel and other essential items. Furthermore, there was no payment required at the food centres and there was plenty of food available: "*...you'd go up to the Darwin High School and get what you wanted; they'd give you this, give you that, you just walk along, pick it up and take it home (Talbot, 1984; p. 74)."* To keep order, people were informed of collection times via a door-to-door leaflet drop: "*we were told we could go to the school at certain times...and line up to get food and ice (Collins, 2008; p. 10)."*

"Yeah, we had to line up you see....but you can only get so much you know because if you line up every day you get that much food in the fridge. They even give you beautiful steak that you never get. You know. When you are shopping in these other... It was beautiful yeah (Respondent 25)."

An Indigenous interviewee recounted the generous nature of Darwin people in the devastating aftermath of Cyclone Tracy. "*When we went into town, W. Chin opened his shop up and said, 'take what you want', so we took what we want, clothes and dry clothes (Talbot, 1984; p.63)."*

Others recounted equal treatment during the period they spent evacuated down south: *"...rich people who accepted us into their homes, they put us in school, took care of my mother... They didn't treat us any different (Respondent 7)."*

"...they was always telling us where we can go to find clothes that was given out, and toys for the kids because they didn't have their toys...they couldn't go swimming because they didn't have bathers. And they were trying to swim with their clothes, shorts and that. And they said 'you can't go swimming like that. You've got to have bathers'. 'Well we haven't got any bathers. They got blown away in the cyclone'...'Oh really?' So they took them and gave them all new bathers. -And looked after them. They had a jolly good time (Respondent 4)."

"...clothes, we got so many nice clothes and I thank Australia from the bottom of my heart for that (Respondent 7)."

"The people at the shopping centre they was real nice. They had this bowl and people filled it up and when we went shopping we didn't pay for anything (Respondent 9)."

Those evacuees who drove south received free fuel, food and clothes while on the road: *"...the treatment was just terrific, it really was. Nobody asked any questions. They rushed to you like in Katherine they....you know, they're standing there with a cup of hot tea for you, and someone's with a towel and this is two days after the cyclone and they've still got the towel to put around you, give you a cup of tea (Respondent 3)."*

And when they returned to Darwin: *"I remember standing up in the line.... when you came back to Darwin you got this resettlement thing which was \$200 and the guy that was standing in front of me was a well-known and quite wealthy businessman. I knew him really well. He owned a pretty big business. And he was standing in front of me, waiting to get the \$200 because he'd lost everything as well. And I remember then thinking to myself 'we're all equal. Everybody's equal, you know, we've all been hit with the same thing.' It's amazing how that makes everybody equal (Respondent 3)."*

Respondents were specifically asked if they thought Indigenous and non-Indigenous people were treated equally following the disaster and the majority stated they considered that they were. *"My experience is that I think we did get treated equally, we had everything. They treated people equally. I can't say were mistreated (Respondent 7)"*

"Well, I can't comment on it because I've never heard anything to the contrary. I presume it was. But we had, you know, I never heard of anything different to that and we had plenty of other friends of all kinds of nationalities. I never heard of anything. There may have been complaints but I never heard anything (Respondent 10)."

These thoughts on equality are supported by Day (1994; p. 69): *"For blacks who stayed by avoiding the musters [forced evacuations], life had never been so good. Abandoned buildings made luxurious homes, food was distributed freely and the spirit of generosity and equality reigned. People who had lived, in the best of times, under leaking scraps of tin without power had little to lose. Just as in wartime, blacks briefly tasted equality in white's disasters."*

6.14 Assistance once back in Darwin – longer term recovery

One non-Indigenous respondent who continues to live next door to the Indigenous community of Bagot (one of the four Indigenous communities within Darwin) discussed

how demountables arrived in Bagot very soon after the disaster to replace the homes that had been destroyed there. Furthermore, they were connected to electricity before the majority of homes in Darwin: *“Their power was on before our power, as their power was hooked up to the RAAF base. Whenever our power went out in the wet season Bagot was always alright...so they would have put the demountables there as they had the power. As the RAAF base would have had back-up the power, they wouldn’t have put them there if they hadn’t had power (Respondent 17).”*

Similarly Indigenous respondents discussed how caravans or tents were provided while their homes were rebuilt: *“Yeah, they had to put two caravans there. One wasn’t enough for all of us. Big family, so they give caravans and that for you to live in while they redone all the houses (Respondent 4).”*

The Indigenous population predominantly lived in government housing and if these old homes were not reconstructed then they were moved to new accommodation elsewhere: *“So they gave me another place in Jingili. Just had to patch it up and make it liveable, you know...the army...replacement louvres and that; make sure the plumbing works was going and things like that until they gradually upgraded each house. They gave you accommodation like caravans or another house to go to (Respondent 22).”*

One respondent discussed how her family had moved to Katherine when they returned to the NT following their period of evacuation. Their family struggled financially and they were living in tents for a year before they moved into government housing: *“when we moved to Katherine we went to nothing...we were actually living in tents for about a year until we could get accommodation...finally housing commission give us a home...So yeah, we struggled a lot (Respondent 1).”*

It was noted that during the rebuilding process the large population of Indigenous people at Rapid Creek was divided: *“There was not a great population here...the only place I knew there were Aboriginal people living at the time were in Rapid Creek as they used to go to Rapid Creek Primary School. I live in Rapid Creek. After the cyclone when everybody came back they decided not to have such a large population of Aboriginal in Rapid Creek so they divided them between Rapid Creek and Millner (Respondent 14).”*

The majority of the Indigenous people prior to Cyclone Tracy lived in government housing. Although many people in Darwin would not have been insured, the non-Indigenous people spoken to, who were all home owners, were insured to some degree and discussed receiving money for their homes and contents. In general there is a positive relationship between home ownership and uptake of contents insurance. It can therefore be hypothesised that many of the Indigenous people living in social housing would not have had contents insurance. This is certainly the case for all of those interviewed. Although the question of insurance was not asked specifically, the majority of Indigenous respondents did discuss the struggle of saving up to replace their possessions. However, all people insured or not, were still eligible to receive money from the disaster fund. This would suggest that Indigenous people suffered more financially following the Cyclone: *“...you just had to wait until you earned enough money to...get back on your feet in the way of clothing and household goods (Respondent 22).”*

“Terrible cause we had to buy our own way back. We had to buy furniture. We didn’t get much support off the government. We had to buy stuff ourselves, every fortnight. And I got a job back...And so we bought some beds. And when we bought a dressing

table we get really silly over it, 'oh look I've got a dressing table now'. We had to buy gradually (Respondent 12)."

Some respondents considered that they had not been treated fairly financially because they were Indigenous: *"Bad for us, 'cos we were Aboriginal....I don't think I was treated fairly that way [in terms of receiving money]. So I had a complaint to make. But they weren't interested 'cos I got a job back and I was looking after myself. So I never got any more money off 'em....Although my father was a white man. From England, white as the driven snow...But my husband was darker than me. So we received a lot of bad feelings in that way...They saw it all as people trying to get money instead, they'd had enough of that so that was...I had to suffer (Respondent 12)."*

"I think just at the end when they distributed some money, I thought that wasn't a good way... That we didn't... We knew millions was raised and we didn't see it. We lost everything. I mean you lost all your stuff... [Question: do you think Aboriginals and white people were treated equally?] I think it would have been easier to leave them [Aboriginals] without a lot of stuff because they wouldn't have put up much of a fuss. Like I didn't put up any fight when I could have... I did lose a lot and \$100 each wasn't going to replace what the kids had lost... for the new clothes, washing machines, whatever was destroyed or taken or used... while you was away. And you know what? You've got to over the year survive. That was all the money we got, \$800. I didn't see anything else. And they repaired a car.... one of the cars for me (Respondent 4)."

Another Indigenous interviewee stated: *"Well, we only – it wasn't that much, but all that money they collected, I don't know what happened to it all [laughter], got me beat (Talbot, 1984; p. 66)."*

In comparison the dominant story for the non-Indigenous respondents was one of receiving some level of compensation from their insurance: *"insurance just paid out because there was no argument about it and then 'um, we'd only just bought the house and it was enough money to pay the house off (Respondent 10)."*

"We'd been insured for six thousand dollars, I think... which was all our contents... so we got our money, which was great, and we put that cheque in the bank. Never seen so much money in one hit before... there were a lot of people under-insured (Wilson, 2003; Tape 11, p. 2)."

It is noted, however, that under-insurance and non-insurance was widespread following Cyclone Tracy and that people of all backgrounds struggled: *"Yes we had insurance for our home and property... No, I don't think most people did (Respondent 14)."*

The non-Indigenous respondents interviewed also questioned what happened to the money that was donated by the Australian public and didn't think it was divided up fairly: *"I often wondered what happened to some of that money (Respondent 14)"*

"Yes... I don't know about the money they collected, we got \$200. I don't think they divided it up very well (Respondent 15)."

It was reported in the newsletter entitled Bunji⁶: *"The Gwalwa Daraniki⁷ hopes that no Bunji readers gave money to the cyclone relief fund. Of course that fund will not be helping many blacks (Bunji April 1975, in Day, 1994; p. 71)."*

⁶ Bunji was a newsletter on Indigenous rights (predominantly land rights) edited by William Bartlett printed in Darwin between 1971 and 1983. One of their focuses was to

6.15 Returning to Darwin

Respondents discussed the permit system and the need to prove you had accommodation before you could return. Many had family who had remained in Darwin who had accommodation in which they could stay. Some evacuees were therefore able to return quickly and easily. Many returned within a matter of months, all were back within a year. One respondent discussed squatting in an empty home. Others lived in caravans and demountables while their home was rebuilt, or before they were moved to new social housing. When asked about assistance many would mention help from friends and family.

“But everyone had to have a permit to come back. If they had a roof over their head or accommodation to come back, they could come back (Respondent 22).”

“We came back here in February. It’s a long time. But we had to get a permit to come back here and they stopped you...when we came back we had one of those, like a house. We had a long, like demountable over here (Respondent 24).”

It is interesting to note that the above respondent considered their less than two month evacuation as ‘a long time’. Many people, especially non-Indigenous people with limited connections in Darwin, did not come back for many months longer than that: *“after [the] baby was born we came back 9 months later, we came back here... As long as you had the accommodation here...and we did...because Mum and Dad still were here and my sister’s house had been patched up and you know, so we had somewhere to stay. So we came back... we stayed with my sister for a while and then we got a flat. Within a year we were back and life started all over again...went back to the same job (Respondent 3).”*

“Oh we had a couple of months, we came back when...not everything was cleaned up...we went back to our house then we got shifted up the road (Respondent 9).”

“But you know, you wouldn’t believe in a couple of months what they’d done. It was amazing. They just came in from everywhere and helped out, you know, the essential services, they cleaned the streets up...And the stench was...for a long time, the stench (Respondent 4).”

“Good to be back. We couldn’t wait to come back, there was still nothing hey...we had two caravans where our house was (Respondent 19).”

Shirley Anne Collins [Indigenous] was on a family holiday in Singapore when Cyclone Tracy devastated Darwin. The Collins’ acquired information about what had happened from the Red Cross. Since they could not return to Darwin, the authorities organised for them to fly to Brisbane where they had family. Collins reports of accessing compensation where one could *“apply for funds so that you can set yourself either up in Brisbane or make your way back to Darwin (Collins, 2008; p. 10).”* Because of their occupations, working for the government and as a cleaner, the Collins’ were considered essential services and were therefore given permission to return to help rebuild. Expediting their return was the fact that their home had suffered little damage.

maintain Kulaluk (an Indigenous community within Darwin city) as Indigenous land and to stop it from being developed.

⁷ Gwalwa Daraniki = our land

“The house was virtually liveable, so we were able to come back (Collins, 2008; p. 10)” within a few weeks.

6.15.1 Difficulties experienced in returning to Darwin

As many of the Indigenous respondents returned to Darwin within a matter of months it is not surprising that they found the conditions unpleasant. The discussion in Text Box 6 is from a family who returned within a matter of weeks. They were homesick and the children did not want to attend school in Adelaide where they were evacuated to. However, they realised that they had returned too soon and Darwin was still in a state of disaster. As the schools were not ready the children’s education suffered. Even those who returned 7 and 9 months later found the conditions tough. They also found it very hot and uncomfortable on their return as they had acclimatised to the lower temperatures down south. One respondent alluded that Darwin wasn’t safe early on due to the heavy presence of military personnel *“Because there was all the army and the servicemen here, you know, to help around the place. We had to keep indoors (Respondent 23).”*

Text Box 6. A Mother and daughter discussing issues of returning early

Respondent 4: *“We came back after a few weeks actually. I was panicking because I couldn’t get back but then we came back and it was a big mistake. We shouldn’t have even come back at that time... Yeah. We’ve forgotten how ugly it was. We got on a plane and came back, getting homesick so we come back. We got off the plane and we were walking back through the RAAF base and we said ‘oh my God, what have we done?’ The smell, the rubbish, the ugliness. And we said ‘what have we done? Why have we come back’... We did go back a bit too soon. There wasn’t anything. Anywhere for anybody such as kids.”*

Interviewer: *“Were there many other families that returned sort of as quickly as you did?”*

Respondent 4: *“No, no.”*

Interviewer: *“So when you went back to school were there other children.”*

Respondent 6: *“No, yeah. It wasn’t good.”*

Respondent 4: *“And there was nowhere to go; nothing to do so we was a little bit lost for a while. Yeah, it did put them back a bit because the schools weren’t ready for them.”*

On seeing Darwin for the first time since Cyclone Tracy, Collins wanted to *“get back on that plane because I just couldn’t see how we could survive. I couldn’t see how the town would return back to normal – the devastation was huge (Collins, 2008; p. 10).”*

“We were there for 7 months, we came back 7 months later and Darwin still needed more cleaning... it was so dead and hot cos we had acclimatised. The first thing I remember is my little brother taking off all his clothes, he said ‘it’s hot mummy’. We just cried, we came back home and mum didn’t want to come in the house. She stood out the front of the door. Dad had the place so spotless but there was still holes in the ceiling... I can remember the smell (Respondent 7).”

“Yeah, pretty basic, you know, pretty tough going. I mean the rebuilding of Darwin was in full swing [9 months after the cyclone] but, you know, you didn’t have a lot of... I mean you had power and things, but, you know, you didn’t get a lot of fresh fruit and all those things... vegetables and those sorts of things (Respondent 3).”

6.15.2 Who returned and who didn't

Respondents considered that the vast majority of Indigenous people returned to Darwin, with only a minority settling in Katherine and Alice Springs and a few who remained down South. Only one of the Indigenous respondents interviewed did not return, instead, due their negative experience of Cyclone Tracy the family decided to settle in Katherine (three hours inland from Darwin). Once settled in Katherine it became financially difficult to move to Darwin: *"Mum and dad decided to leave Darwin because they didn't want to go through that again.... Mum and dad said that we were going to get out of Darwin, and we moved to Katherine. And most of our schooling was in Katherine... But going to Katherine was good. Going to Primary was good there...I think it was too much for them. And the fact that we struggled so much when we moved, financially I don't think they could see us moving back here [Darwin], getting a house and a job and looking after all us kids. We definitely struggled, that's for sure (Respondent 1)."*

"Oh yes, everyone came back. Oh...a few hey... Thomas mob went to Katherine.... yeah some people went to Katherine and Alice Springs...I don't think they came back...they stayed as they got a house from the housing commission so they was lucky (Respondent 9)."

"No, they wouldn't move [referring to Larrakia people]. They went, we had to be evacuated we had no choice, but they came back, they came back.... I can name the people who are still down south now. Some family members that are Larrakia, some people died down south and didn't come back. Some were traumatised (Respondent 7)".

"All our friends and relatives they came back they were all still here (Respondent 18)."

"Yeah we all come back no one decided to leave Darwin (Respondent 19)."

In comparison, many non-Indigenous people never returned to Darwin: *"The whole population changed half of the people never came back.... that was just Caucasians (Respondent 15)."*

"Well they [non-Indigenous] all came back to sort through their belongings, but a heck of a lot left town. [Question: what about the Aboriginals?] Well this is their country they are not going to go someplace else (Respondent 16)."

For some though, it was a very difficult decision to make. Hilda Muir describes how she didn't want to return to Darwin because of fear, sadness and anger about losing her husband and not being able to attend his funeral because she had been evacuated to Brisbane (Muir, 2004).

6.15.3 Connection to country and community

The strong connection to their country and community was the reason the Indigenous respondents had to return to Darwin and could not consider settling away from their homeland. The need to protect and care for their country was also discussed. Many were homesick and lost while evacuated.

"Cos we knew we couldn't live down south, away from Darwin. This is our coast. And you've got to be back home on your home ground. And so we panicked a bit for that. Yeah, I remember reading and hearing that [rumour that Darwin was not going to be

rebuilt]...An Aboriginal person can't live on someone else's land. They've got a thing of homeland, their homelands (Respondent 4)."

"So we have ties back into our heritage. We're fortunate enough to have that twice. Some people are still, you know, are trying to find connections to where they belong and how they get to go back home. We had it all the time, even before the cyclone. So that's one of the reasons we wanted to come back from Perth...Is because we were connected to our country which we visit all the time...That's our identity, our heritage (Respondent 6)."

"I'm the same as my mother, I'm not leaving. There is no place like home..... The whole of Australia is beautiful but there is no place like home. My heart...this is what we do we care for our country, we protect our country. My mother's brother used to protect this country and we took over. We have been looking after it for centuries, the Larrakia people have always looked after this country (Respondent 7)."

"I was just happy to come back, I always want to come back home (Respondent 11)."

"Yeah....we just couldn't wait to come back. Wanted to come back, you know...I had to come back (Respondent 3)."

6.16 Cyclone as a punishment

Respondent 2 referred to the Rover Thomas artwork (Text Box 7), a depiction of a vision of Cyclone Tracy by an Indigenous elder in Western Australia. Cyclone Tracy was interpreted by the elder as a punishment for Indigenous people who were losing touch with their cultural heritage. Although not a vision by an Indigenous member of the Darwin community, the artwork and its cultural meaning were held in high regard by Respondent 2.

This respondent considered that Darwin needed another cyclone in order to punish those disrespecting the Indigenous culture and also those ignoring the cyclone risks, destroying the mangroves and building marinas on the coast: "I actually feel like we need another one...if that makes any sort of sense. What that old man said about why we got it last time is probably ten times as true now. There's unrestrained development in our lands; there's people misrepresenting themselves as Larrakia; we seem to not get any proper recognition...we get, you know, some bits of help here, we've got this place just now, from the Indigenous land court, but, yeah, I have to say I think we need another big one to wake a few people up. And not only all the unrestrained development, but also the coastal stuff. What we've always said is you've got to maintain mangroves and you've got to maintain a bit of a buffer and instead they go and build marinas right on the coast...Cullen Bay, you can't get sinkage insurance there because it's sinking because it's built on sand or mud. So, yeah, I think they need another lesson, a big cyclone. Just hopefully there won't be as much loss of life or any loss of life (Respondent 2)."

Text Box 7. The Rover Thomas artwork 'Cyclone Tracy'

During the early 1970's, Aboriginal elders became concerned that the younger generations were losing touch with Aboriginal culture and law due to the forced migration of people. An interpretation of Cyclone Tracy was revealed to an Aboriginal elder at Kalumburu, the northern most settlement in Western Australia. In this dream visitation, the cyclone was represented as a Rainbow Serpent that destroyed Darwin as a warning to all Aboriginal people to uphold their culture and law (Caruana, 1993). It is

suggested that Darwin was destroyed because it was the main centre of European influence in northern Australia.



Figure 2. Aboriginal art work by Rover Thomas entitled 'Cyclone Tracy'

Rover Thomas [Joolama]

Kukatja/Wangkajunga peoples

1926/1928 Australia – 1998

Cyclone Tracy 1991

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Purchased 1991

© the artist's estate courtesy Warmun Art Centre

The subject of 'Cyclone Tracy' by Rover Thomas recalls the origins of the Kuril Kuril Ceremony. The black form represents the cyclone gathering intensity as it heads towards Darwin. The shape relates to conventional images of the subject developed in early dance emblems. Minor winds are shown as forms emanating from the main image (Caruana, 1993; p. 166).

Another respondent also noted that the recent disasters were a lesson: “*This disaster in 2011...everything is getting cyclone, fire and earthquake I think that is a warning how the people are living, they lives 'cos them days really drugs a wasn't so bad but now it's getting out of hand. That's just me I don't know what others think* (Respondent 9).”

6.17 Change in Darwin after the cyclone

When asked about the social and physical changes in Darwin after the cyclone the majority did not focus on the initial period following Tracy but considered the full time period between Tracy and the current day. It was clear that people saw their lives in Darwin as two distinct periods – before Cyclone Tracy and afterwards. The majority felt that Darwin was a nicer place to live before the cyclone (see Text Box 8). They considered it to be a smaller, friendlier community. Since then many think Darwin has developed too much, crime is an issue and it is now too busy and expensive.

Text Box 8. Respondents discuss how Darwin has changed after Cyclone Tracy

Respondent 22: *“Oh, it was no longer Darwin. The old Darwin was lovely. But then the place became modern, bigger. It was so pretty, I think. Now they’re beautifying it. The gardens everywhere. It’s taken all this time...”*

Respondent 24: *“I don’t know, but it’d never be the same like it used to be from there, but...”*

Respondent 22: *“I think Darwin was a better place”*

Respondent 24: *“Yeah, before the Tracy”*

Respondent 24: *“Before Tracy, everybody was happy. Everybody knew each other”*

“Darwin changed after Cyclone Tracy And some people say for the better and I say for the worse but you know, there is progress everywhere and I just think that it was something that had to happen up here. But these days I just think that Darwin has lost its character that it used to have (Respondent 8).”

“Yes, things have changed. Yeah. It wasn’t Darwin. It wasn’t like everybody knew everybody. Everybody helped everybody; cared about everybody. It was different. And then this place filled up. Instead of people staying away there seemed to be an influx of people coming. Well there was a lot of work, I suppose. Then they got to like the laid-back lifestyle and they stayed instead of going. You know, cleaning up and going? Or coming up and doing what they had to do then leave. But I think there was a lot of the work that brought them up, most of them. And they got to like it. Then the place got bigger and bigger and bigger (Respondent 4).”

Lorna Talbot, an older Indigenous resident who experienced Cyclone Tracy, was quoted as saying: *“I liked Darwin in the older days. Now, it’s too much robbing and killing and things going on like that. Before you used to be able to walk around, you know, without being scared about what’s going to happen to you. Now you are too scared to walk down the street. These days, you know, kids, teenagers, just snatch your bags and yeah it’s terrible (Wells, 2002; p. 156).”*

“The change in population, the crime, it’s just you can’t do that anymore. It’s just the CBD is just huge, you know, it’s like, I mean it’s not like the old Darwin and I prefer the old Darwin to the new. But you gotta go forward. But yeah, definitely different, I guess you could depend on people back then. Now you’re so spread out and everything is so expensive, so it doesn’t help (Respondent 1).”

6.18 Discussions of personal experiences of the cyclone

Talking about the cyclone with friends and family in the years since the event was not something all respondents had done. For some it was always a topic of conversation and something they were happy to chat about. For others it was clear that the traumatic events remained too difficult to discuss: *“And I remember being asked about three years ago, they had a thing at the library here, a lunchtime talk and said ‘would you like to come along and talk about it, tell us about your experience’, and there’d be tourists and all that sort of thing there and I said ‘yeah, I’ll do it’, and much the same as when I got here, I just became so emotional, and when I started telling the story, I couldn’t tell it. And I realised that I’d never ever spoken about it, we’d never sat down and had a real good talk about it. Life just goes on, you know... You do need to do that though, like sit down and just debrief the whole thing, you know? And even now it’s difficult to talk about some of those things. It’s really left a lasting effect, a real lasting effect on us... our whole family the same. You know, you just...because it’s such a surreal and unreal*

experience that you can't comprehend it, you just can't deal with it. You just stumble from one thing to the next (Respondent 3)."

"And they [mum and dad] never ever talked about their experiences. Now that I've got to think about it, it must have been quite frightening for them... it was really funny you know, now that I've thought about it, I never asked my mum and dad what they felt, how terrible (Respondent 1)"

"It was always a topic of discussion, especially if we had some visitors from down south or something. I mean if you lived through it you'd like to tell the story and how, you know, what happened, etc. (Respondent 2)."

"When we got home everything got back to normal but everyone talked about the cyclone and they laughed about it, what they was doing in the house running around like mad chooks, it wasn't funny then, but after it had happened it was funny then... that was good that they talked about it, make them come good, you know (Respondent 9)."

6.19 Passing advice on to others

One respondent discussed how she passed on information about what to expect from a cyclone to her Queensland based niece and nephew prior to the arrival of Cyclone Yasi in February 2011: *"I had to tell them what it was going to be like. And scare them a bit and I thought oh God, OK...My nephew was saying no we're staying in the house, its brick and I said yeah but this is what you're going to go through and he said you're scaring me now. Well that's the whole idea. I have to tell you how it's going to be.... In the end they decided to stay in the home because they said the house was fine. And I said well you better have a backup plan. If your roof goes, you have to have a plan B, go into another room. Get into the car...you won't be able to move because the wind is so strong outside. So give them all those scenarios and make sure they had enough food for 5 days because I said if help can't get to you, you're stuck there. So they were prepared for that, they filled up their water. But it was just frightening to think that oh God, it's going to be loud and scary. But I said if you're going to stay in there get something on top of you just in case something falls on you. Or if something's going to suck you out make sure you can hold on to something. He said, oh yeah, yep, writing it all down. I said I don't mean to scare you but that's how it is going to go down. So he was yep, um, I'm going to do that (Respondent 1)."*

6.20 Current cyclone fears, preparedness, likely actions

A number of respondents discussed their fear of another cyclone the magnitude of Tracy. Many stated that although they knew that their homes were likely to be safe, as they were now built to code, their favoured response would still be to go to the shelters. *"We had a cyclone here just recently...I was like so nervous about it and I said 'We're going to have to go to a shelter'...and we've got a brand new house we've just built. It's all cyclone coded and you know it's to everything. But I was still really nervous, you know? (Respondent 3)."*

The above respondent went on to explain that when his house was being rebuilt after Tracy, he was worried that the builders had taken a short-cut and not followed the new building codes. *"I made them knock the wall down to show me that they had actually put it in and they said to me 'you're crazy, we put it in'. I said 'I don't care. I don't believe that's been put in. I want to be sure. Knock part of the wall down. I don't care what it costs. Knock part of it down and show me that that steel has gone through'. So*

they did. They knocked it down and there it was. The steel had gone that far down. That was crazy. They think I'm crazy with that stuff. But then I feel safe in the house (Respondent 3)".

Many others stated that their plan was to drive inland rather than stay at their homes or shelters, again, even though they knew the shelters were built to the required cyclone codes: *"I think I would have to go either further down the track or drive all the way to Katherine. I don't think I could do it. It's just you know, I think the shelters would be OK but yeah, I don't know. I would have to decide on the day. But I won't be staying in my home, that's for sure (Respondent 1)."*

Others did not discuss the relative safety of their homes or the shelters but just expressed a need to get out of town if another cyclone the size of Tracy were to head towards Darwin: *"...I'd go bush I think...Go down to Batchelor somewhere (Talbot, 1984; p. 68)."*

"We wouldn't want to go through one of those again.... If they say there is another one coming I get frightened, start packing up my things and putting them in my car and I want to go (Respondent 19)."

"Yeah I would leave now. I'm much older and not well. I would go to my children. I would go to Katherine (Respondent 9)."

The fear of a large cyclone and the need to escape inland demonstrates the great impact that the experience of Tracy continues to have on people's likely actions during a large cyclone. This is reinforced by an interview with Bill Wilson, who experienced Tracy and later became the Assistant Police Commissioner of Darwin *"When I hear the cyclone warning on the radio I go into hysterics almost. My hair on the back of my neck stands up, and I swear that if it's bigger than a category three I will leave home and go to Adelaide River for the duration of the cyclone. The noise stays with me. The noise is in the back of my mind all the time when there's a cyclone. It comes back to me and I remember that squealing, screeching, howling noise. And I obviously am affected by it (Wilson, 2003; Tape 10, p. 12)."* The long term impact of Tracy and the fact that memories of the disaster remain very vivid are discussed further in Section 6.21.

A number of other respondents, however, stated that they now felt safe in their homes due to the new building codes. One respondent noted that they would stay in their home because once you had gone to a shelter they wouldn't let you out for a period of time once the cyclone had passed, even though it was safe.

"It was good in a way because they had changed the way they built...the place was rebuilt and made safer...like it wasn't just a brick home now. They reinforced holding the bricks in enough, you know, putting steel...They reinforced it so you felt safer (Respondent 4)."

"Oh yeah, I'd stay here. It's [the house] got straps. Not on the outside here, but on the inside. It's got big straps that go right down into the concrete. See these big concrete blocks; they've got straps down in the inside. Big straps and bolts go through them. But they don't show it out here. But if a cyclone comes it never shakes.... Hardly anybody go to shelters (Respondent 25)."

6.20.1 Cultural knowledge on environmental signs

A number of Indigenous respondents discussed how they now watch natural signs in the environment, something many had learnt to do since Cyclone Tracy. In particular

one respondent noted how during a recent cyclone they didn't worry about making preparations as they didn't see the ants taking cover. *"Cyclone Carlos, the one we just had. They said it's going to be a big one but I noticed the ants didn't go for shelter... Yes, I didn't even tape up my windows like I usually do every wet season... So it pays to watch the nature -The trees and different signs (Respondent 24)."*

"...like the last cyclone that was in Darwin [February 2011]...I got up that morning...I knew nothing about that cyclone coming, I knew nothing at all. I was getting up to go to work...and I walked outside and I came straight back in and I said 'there's a cyclone, there's a cyclone'. And she said 'Oh no, it's going to be ok'. And I said 'no, that's a cyclone'...straight away like bang I knew that, instantly knew that that was a cyclone, different from a big storm. You knew straight away. You could feel it in the air (Respondent 3)."

"I think it was Cyclone Thelma, I think about 10 years ago...it was more or less coming straight for us and I remember waking up.... well that night it was dead still. There wasn't an insect, there wasn't a bird...There was silence and it was still. There was not a breath of air. It was really hot and then the next morning it was the same. But by that afternoon it had moved off and then the day after all the birds and insects came back. So I've tried to check out what the wildlife were doing whenever there's a low around. I know then if I wake up and there's no insects and no birds, yeah, it's close. That means you should get out of there or get prepared properly (Respondent 2)."

A number of examples were provided of animals alerting Aboriginal people to dangerous changes in the weather. *"So yes, so we've got our belief that we can communicate with the animals; that we can affect the weather. I don't claim to be able to sing up anything, but I know that there are people that can and I've witnessed that myself... weather being altered by people. But that's not really accepted or believed in the mainstream. They think its mythology. I guess we just talk about that amongst ourselves mainly. So mainly we expect the majority of Aboriginal people to understand. -But we know that it's true (Respondent 2)."*

Indigenous families still pass on traditional knowledge through stories but they are: *"not passed on in an organised way, I guess. It's just orally passed on to the kids, especially if there's something around we've told them 'this is what you've got to look out for.' And often when that topic comes up within our mob, that story about what the animals were doing is a part of it, so I know they said that dragonflies aren't the best indicator of when the season changes but for us, we know that, you know, there's all those sorts of seasonal indicators and if there's bad weather around there's warnings from wildlife basically (Respondent 2)."*

It was noted that despite the importance of the environmental signs to the Indigenous people they were not taken seriously by many non-Indigenous people, particularly scientific institutions such as the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM). Furthermore the more spiritual meaning of the possible causes of the disasters is ignored.

"if you go on the Bureau of Meteorology website there's stuff about incidents where the knowledge is fairly limited, I'm not sure why. There's been lots of meetings and lots of discussions about trying to make that stuff a bit more accessible, but today it's still there's only about 4, 5 places that you can click on and go and get information. Yeah, that's fairly limited now. So, I'm sure there's other stories about the wildlife and about the fact that these cyclones aren't necessarily just an act of nature, like what that old man said...in the museum, that there are aspects to them that are more spiritual or esoteric (Respondent 2)."

6.21 Long term impact and psychological trauma

Psychological trauma was a common theme. Understandably people feared another cyclone of the magnitude of Tracy and this impacted on their likely actions and behaviour in a large cyclone (see Section 6.20). People noted that losing a loved one or close friend was the greatest impact. However, the shock and upheaval of the cyclone had nevertheless left a scar on those who had experienced the event relatively unscathed. People noted becoming emotional when talking about or remembering the event, fearing storms, not wanting to enter the museum sound room at the Cyclone Tracy exhibition and losing photographs. Another common impact noted was on children's education which was disrupted by the cyclone, evacuation and the rebuilding process.

"I wouldn't like to go through another one. I went to the museum to have a look and they got one place there and I thought nah, I'm keeping away from it 'cos it bring back memories, you know. I always think about my Godmother died in the cyclone and her brother and a friend. A friend of ours that we grew up with, her father died in the cyclone so it was really sad. I never go into that room there to listen to the roaring sound of the cyclone, 'cos people that we knew (Respondent 11)."

"Photos...like when we were kids. All gone, all that stuff is...you don't have it. My daughters say to me 'Dad we don't have any photos of you until you were 20', you know. And we lost them all. So those things are like, you know, people suffered all that...I mean people suffered much more than we did obviously. People died and all that. But psychologically it leaves a real scar, I reckon, a real scar. I was even a bit nervous coming here today and I was thinking about it...trying to remember it again. In fact I drove past the house where we spent the night, as I was coming here, thinking.....I couldn't see it, but the road goes down to it (Respondent 3)."

"I had a lot of fears about lightning and thunder until probably 7-8 years ago. I decided to face my fears and just sit out there and watch and listen and got through it. So I'm glad I done that cause I've been hiding from it for such a long time (Respondent 1)."

"Yeah, that cyclone did affect us you know, well it affected my husband a lot. And it affected my children...one of them was really scared, you know (Respondent 21)."

There was no widespread counselling provided after the disaster and it was clear that people had never dealt with their trauma. This was noted by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous interviewees. One respondent who worked at a counselling service for Indigenous people noted that because there were no services provided after Tracy it remained an issue that they still had to deal with today.

"I think you need to sit down and have a real good talk about it, to someone who wants to listen to it...But once I started work...again, see, that's what happened, you don't deal with it, you just go straight back to work, straight into work. You've got jobs to do. You come home. You've got a new baby. You know, all those things, so you never get a chance to...Not that it bothers me through my normal life but when you start to talk about it you become emotional now...and what is it? 1974? What's that, 37 years ago or something? 37 years ago and it still affects me. I mean that had a real impact. That's an incredible impact - amazing thing (Respondent 3)."

"Back then of course there was no trauma counselling the way there is now, and I think we've all...me certainly, probably was traumatised by the cyclone, and because there was no way to counsel people, other than over a beer in those days...I think a lot of us,

certainly me, probably carry mental scars from the cyclone (Wilson, 2003; Tape 10, p. 12)."

Conversely, Hilda Muir discussed receiving psychological treatment in Ward One at Darwin Hospital after having severe panic attacks in relation to fear associated with her experience of Cyclone Tracy (Muir, 2004). Muir describes attending counselling for several months with many other people who had also experienced breakdowns after the cyclone: *"You'd talk and talk, telling your story, your history, and they'd listen and take an interest in you. You can start to feel better when somebody shows you compassion (Muir, 2004; p. 113)."*

For one Indigenous respondent, however, the long term impacts had been positive as the experience had given her a deep respect for the power of nature and led her to a career of conservation work: *"the most significant thing is, you know, at that age, realising the power of Mother Nature and my respect for Mother Nature, so I've done a range of work of conservation ever since and have a deep respect for nature and animals...wildlife (Respondent 2)."*

6.22 Indigenous resilience: connections to country, family and community

When asked about coping emotionally or getting assistance for contents and lost belongings it was discussed by respondents that Indigenous people are more resilient as they are not as reliant on material possessions. It was also discussed how Indigenous people could rely on the land for food and had many family connections and people whom they could get help from. They were therefore more self sufficient than the white people, who they considered may not have had the same level of connection within the land and community, particularly those who had recently arrived. Similarly it was noted that some of the itinerant Indigenous people would have been equally lost and destitute following the cyclone and more exposed to the initial impacts due to their lack of shelter. This theme also links in to the connection to country and the pull to come back to Darwin following the disaster.

"My view is, you know...because we'd been through...my people had been through a lot before the cyclone, so also we were people that didn't have much at all... we could go for fishing and hunting, so fortunately we connected to the land compared to others... we had nothing, but the things we had that was everything to us you know? The bit of clothes or whatever that Mum's taught us to, you know, this is what we've got, we've never, like, you know, worried about other material stuff...so when you mention about the urgency of getting this and that, we sort of went along with it because, like I said, we only had what we had earlier...we wasn't the type to worry about other stuff because we got what we got...Again we were fortunate that our house didn't go down. We had each other to comfort and had that as well (Respondent 6)."

"...my brother came and picked me and my son up and took us to his place in Ludmilla. He had got his friends up to fix the roof. My cousin had a shop in Parap and they got some food from there... the house was full of people, we would lay anywhere Respondent 11)."

"They'd [white fellas] sort of live in the town and go to school and go home, go to work and go home. We had our time in the bush. We still do. Now all the Aboriginal people would have that. But the ones that's turned to alcohol all come and live in town overloading the town, causing the destruction. But the ones that are still traditional, which we've got a lot of good relations that's very traditional. They stay in the

communities. They work in the communities and yeah..... We took in a lot of people like what was close relatives, not just anybody. The ones that... the Darwin Aboriginals, were the loneliest ones. The pipeline ones... they had no home. I don't know how, they were possibly insane. Because they still were getting what they wanted to get, you know, rations, and being cared for (Respondent 4)."

This is supported by a non-Indigenous respondent who noted that Indigenous people do not have the same materialistic values as he does. This respondent notes however, that the homeless Indigenous population would have been vulnerable due to their lack of shelter during Tracy: *"Every time since Tracy I think of the itinerants, the Aboriginal people, and where they go during the course of these tropical events and it sort of brings it home to you how lucky we are when we've got our own residents that are built to fairly stringent codes and there's such a lot of people outside that don't have that same luxury as us. I often wonder what happens to those people. I guess after Tracy those that survived went walkabout or back to their own local communities and you know, just live a different lifestyle to us, more nomadic. Don't need the materialistic possessions that we all want. Well I do anyway. It just illustrates the great divide between some of the population and the Europeans who want and have everything (Respondent 8)."*

However, Day (1994) notes that although the cyclone had left the Kalaluk Indigenous campsite bare and exposed, the residents were industrious and had begun to recycle materials and furniture dumped on the Kalaluk land as the Darwin recovery process got underway: *"At the main Kulaluk camp the people live as they have always lived. Cooking on a fire, carrying water. Possum hunting is easy because there are no leaves on the trees. The people of the dreaming cannot be chased away from their land by a cyclone (Bunji January 1975, in Day, 1994, p. 70)."*

6.23 Documentation of the Indigenous experience at the museum

The Cyclone Tracy Exhibit at the Museum and Art Gallery of the NT tells the story of Cyclone Tracy through, photographs, films and artefacts. It also recreates the experience of Tracy and the changes that it brought. However, the story it tells is notably one of a non-Indigenous nature. This was noted by one respondent who was angry that this was the case and was pleased that the experience of Indigenous people was now being captured in this report.

"Did you notice it?...I don't recall seeing Indigenous photos of Indigenous people there, pinned up on the corrugated iron in the museum there. There is nothing and you see the certificates there and there is some sort of write up there it's all about the non-Indigenous. They never mention anything about the Indigenous people... it's been on my mind for so long. Thank you so much for coming I didn't think anyone was interested. We have never been interviewed for it and it's my privilege to do that, and I'm happy (Respondent 7)."

6.24 Current emergency arrangements

"Of course we are much better prepared now, but that preparation comes out of the Tracy experience...with the population turnover it would be very easy for Darwin to fall back into the pre-cyclone complacency. But cyclone preparedness now still continues, as a result of Tracy...If Tracy hadn't been quite as bad I wonder if our planning now would be as good (Wilson, 2003; Tape 10, p. 10)."

This was felt by Bill Wilson (who ended his police career as the NT Assistant Police Commissioner) to be due to two factors, 1) that there remain in Darwin people who went through Tracy and 2) that Tracy was such a large event cyclone disaster mitigation remains an important issue. However, it was questioned what would happen once those who have the lived experience pass on.

Itinerants are now warned ahead of a cyclone and are provided with transport to shelters. One of the interviewees discussed that he sometimes volunteers to assist in warning and transporting the long grassers when they need to be evacuated to shelter: *"...many years later when there was a cyclone I was part of the people who rounded up those people, you know, picked them up and took them to a school (Respondent 3)."*

7. CONCLUSION

The research has identified a number of unique circumstances, challenges and responses in the Indigenous experience of Cyclone Tracy that have not been documented as part of the non-Indigenous experience. The strong cultural connection with the country was a factor both in different reflections on what had happened in the lead up to the cyclone and what happened post-cyclone. Some Indigenous respondents talked about the role of traditional knowledge in preparing them for the cyclone, for example. Others discussed how they had been aware of this traditional knowledge but due to their cultural heritage being mixed with a more contemporary Australian education they had not taken the Indigenous early warnings seriously. Many noted that this was a lesson they had learnt the hard way and since Cyclone Tracy, they had learnt to interpret the signals in the environment. Almost all respondents noted their cultural attachment to country which made Indigenous people more likely to return to Darwin after the evacuation.

The cyclone as a form of punishment was discussed passionately by one respondent with reference to the vision of Cyclone Tracy by an Indigenous elder in Western Australia and the Rover Thomas art work. The respondent argued that the situation was now worse than it had been in 1974, as Indigenous people were not upholding their cultural identity and the environment was being degraded. In particular, and as discussed by Veland *et al.* (2010), this respondent noted that the risks from potential impacts is increasing due to coastal development and the loss of the mangroves which create a natural buffer along the coast. Therefore, more severe impacts from a cyclone would be expected and this would be a punishment for losing their natural resilience. The fact that an interpretation of Cyclone Tracy was revealed to an Indigenous elder in Western Australia demonstrates that the impact of Tracy was felt by Indigenous communities of great distance from Darwin. In the years following, Cyclone Tracy has appeared in numerous Indigenous songs, ceremonies and artwork in parts of Western Australia and the Northern Territory (Nowra, 1997, Samson, 2001).

The interviews revealed that in many ways Indigenous people considered that they were better able to cope and recover from the disaster than non-Indigenous people. This was because they were not as reliant on material possessions and therefore didn't worry about what they had lost. Moreover, Indigenous people could rely on the land for food and their direct and extended family members for help. Indigenous people were therefore more self sufficient than their non-Indigenous neighbours, who they considered may not have had the same level of connection with the land and community, particularly those who had recently moved to Darwin. However, it was noted that some of the itinerant Indigenous people may have been more exposed to the initial impacts due to their lack of shelter.

In general, however, the Indigenous experience of Cyclone Tracy was very similar to that of the broader Darwin population. Participants did not have the sense that Indigenous people were treated substantially differently to non-Indigenous people in terms of evacuation procedures, health care, or resettlement. Similarly, although respondents talked about the differences between part and full Indigenous people, there was no sense that these differences led to separate treatment during the initial response and recovery period following Cyclone Tracy. There was some talk, however, about different actions – Larrakia people more likely to return while others were more likely to return to their communities of origin.

One explanation provided by Professor Larkin (Section 5.1), for the lack of separate treatment, includes a set of 'contexts' applying to Darwin society at that time and the nature of the emergency – how such a crisis at such a time in such a place precluded the establishment of different systems to deal with different populations.

In summary, the following conclusions can be drawn in relation to the original aims and objectives:

Vulnerability and treatment of Indigenous people in Darwin during Cyclone Tracy – differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous group

Some Indigenous respondents noted how traditional knowledge had prepared them for the cyclone. Others lacked this knowledge but had learnt to interpret environmental signs and signals since Tracy. Many respondents considered that they were less vulnerable than their non-Indigenous neighbours, particularly people who had recently arrived in Darwin. No substantial differences in terms of the evacuation procedures, health care, or resettlement were noted between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups.

Documentation of any changes in Indigenous population mobility

It is difficult to draw any conclusions relating to the impacts of Cyclone Tracy on Indigenous demographic change in Darwin around this period. The changes documented include slower post-cyclone Indigenous population growth rates and a loss of Indigenous males in the early mid-life age group. However, this pattern reflects that which was occurring across the Northern Territory. Furthermore, this was a period when Indigenous people were less inclined to identify themselves as Indigenous. The use of migration (both temporary and permanent) by Indigenous groups as an adaptation strategy to recent disasters and future environmental change is in need of further research.

Current day vulnerability

Research participants talked about how their experiences of Cyclone Tracy have impacted their sense of preparedness for future cyclones, and what role their Indigenous identities play in both reflecting on those experiences and preparing for the future. Professor Larkin's insights (Section 5.1) provide an additional lens through which the issue of Indigenous experience of future events must be considered. The extent to which the current generation of Indigenous people in Darwin would be impacted by a cyclone in similar or different ways to 1974 is determined not only by the lived and inherited experience of those who were in Darwin for Cyclone Tracy, but by the many ways in which 'Indigenous Darwin' (and 'non-Indigenous Darwin') has changed in the past 37 years. The political, demographic, social, cultural and physical contexts are very different now to what they were then, and there has been an increasing separation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (and even between different Indigenous peoples) in many of these contexts. The creation of a separation has allowed Indigenous people in Darwin to connect more deeply with their cultural knowledge and identity, and some participants in this research saw that as a positive aspect in terms of their preparedness for future events. At the same time, the 'equality' of treatment of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people that occurred with the response to Cyclone Tracy was also seen as a positive aspect in helping the Darwin community as a whole cope with the initial shock and generate the collective energy needed for rebuilding.

As detailed in Mason and Haynes (2010), due to the building codes now in place in Darwin, it is unlikely that people outside of the surge zone will need to be evacuated in a similar event. It is also unlikely that a disaster of similar scale would be responded to in the same way today. As Darwin has a transient population, it is possible that some

residents would self-evacuate to other parts of Australia. However, it is highly likely that assistance would be provided locally in order to keep families and communities together. Furthermore, local and Territory based government and emergency management agencies would now lead the response and recovery efforts rather than an outside federal agency.

The advancement of forecasting procedures has meant that the provision of warnings is now much improved since Cyclone Tracy. All respondents noted that they received these warnings from multiple sources. Furthermore, a significant amount of general preparedness material is provided throughout the year. Other research (Li, 2009b) has noted that long-term Darwin residents now have similar cyclone risk perceptions to experts in the field. As would be expected, however, short term residents (particularly those who did not experience Cyclone Tracy) are less aware.

Nevertheless, Li (2009a) notes that exposure to the surge risk within Darwin is increasing. The number of people and assets within the well calculated and recognised surge zone has increased, despite the recognition within the Northern Territory Planning Scheme Amendment in 2006, which identifies land use planning as an adaptive approach to storm surge risk.

Despite recognising the safety of their homes to withstand cyclonic winds, many respondents noted that in the event of a severe cyclone they would prefer to go to an official shelter or alternatively travel in-land. Their fear of weathering a large cyclone at home was very much related to the trauma they had experienced during Cyclone Tracy.

This research has demonstrated that much of the Indigenous population living within Darwin is fairly urbanized and, although many retain their Indigenous cultural heritage, are able to work with the fairly standard Australian emergency management warnings and procedures in place. This may not to be the case for the transient itinerants or Indigenous people living on communities in regional areas outside of Darwin. However, apart from that presented in Section 4, little research is currently being conducted in order to inform the policy and practice of culturally appropriate strategies for reducing the risks and responding to Indigenous communities in the event of a large natural disaster (see Doohan, 2004, Veland *et al.*, 2010).

Overall, this research has emphasised that the specificities of time and place and people determine the experiences of extreme events like Cyclone Tracy. A different cyclone in a different location at a different time with a different set of Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) people would almost certainly result in a vastly different set of experiences for those people. Future research should compare what we have found here with other events – Cyclone Les and the Katherine Floods in 1998, Cyclone Monica and its impacts on communities across the Top End in 2006, Cyclones Larry (2006) and Yasi (2011) in Far North Queensland, for example – to determine whether there are core learnings that cut through specificities or improve our understanding of the impacts of specificities and so can help increase Indigenous community preparedness and resilience for the future.

8. AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Katharine Haynes

Dr Katharine Haynes is a senior Research Fellow at Risk Frontiers specialising in disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation. Katharine has considerable experience conducting qualitative interviews, quantitative surveys and participatory processes with members of the public, emergency management practitioners, professionals and policy makers. She completed her PhD at the School of Environmental Sciences, University of East Anglia, UK.

Katharine's research interests include the implementation and adaptation of policy and organisational procedure, the science-policy interface, risk communication, and community and youth-based disaster risk reduction. Katharine has experience working on a range of hazards and risks within: Montserrat, WI; Philippines; Indonesia; Australia and the United Kingdom. Katharine was called as an expert witness at the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, following the Black Saturday bushfire disaster. She has worked on a number of projects for the Australian emergency management sector, private organisations and international NGO'S. Katharine is the moderator of the UNISDR Prevention Web online forum "Children Youth and Disasters Network".

Deanne Bird

Dr Deanne Bird is a social science Research Fellow at Risk Frontiers specialising in disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation. She has extensive experience in conducting surveys using a mixture of methods including open, semi-structured and structured interviews and was awarded a PhD in 2010 from the University of Iceland and Macquarie University after completing research on the social dimensions of volcanic hazard and risk in southern Iceland. She has also been involved in research projects in Cape Verde, Italy, Samoa, Switzerland, and the United States.

Deanne's most recent projects include investigations of: factors that enable and inhibit adaptation strategies within populations affected by flood in Queensland and Victoria; the use of social media for communicating hazard and risk information during extreme events in Australia; policy changes associated with the January and February 2009 heatwave that affected southern Australia; and, the Australian public's opinion of climate change and nuclear power. Deanne has also been involved in rapid-response post-disaster assessments in conjunction with the 2009 tsunami in Samoa, the 2010 Eyjafjallajökull eruption in Iceland and the 2010/11 floods in Queensland.

Dean Carson

Professor Dean Carson is a population researcher with Flinders University and Charles Darwin University. Dean specialises in the study of short term and long term human population migration patterns, with a particular focus on migration to, from and around rural and remote Australia. Dean is part of an international research collaboration examining (among other things) the impacts of climate change on the demography of 'remote norths' in Canada, Alaska, Europe and Australia. Dean has conducted a range of research on the Indigenous demography of the Northern Territory (including Darwin and surrounds).

Steven Larkin

Professor Steven Larkin, a Kungarakany man from Darwin, was appointed as Pro Vice-Chancellor – Indigenous Leadership at Charles Darwin University in January 2009. Previously Steven spent 10 years as a member of the Commonwealth Government's Senior Executive Service (SES) where he served in a number of Commonwealth agencies. Before moving to Canberra in 1995, Steven spent more than 17 years working in health and community development programs in urban, rural and remote Aboriginal communities throughout the NT. He commenced as the Deputy Principal of AIATSIS in 2002 before his appointment as Principal in June 2004. Professor Larkin's previous positions include National Aboriginal Health Adviser to the Australian Medical Association (AMA), inaugural CEO of the Secretariat of the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO), Assistant Secretary in the Commonwealth Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health (OATSIH), and a short

stint as Assistant Secretary managing the National Indigenous Employment Program within the Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business.

Steven has been Adjunct Associate Professor in Indigenous Health at James Cook University since 2002 and was appointed Adjunct Professorial Fellow at Charles Darwin University in 2006. Steve holds a Bachelor of Social Work Degree, a Masters Degree in Social Science and is currently completing his Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). He maintains both an ongoing personal and professional interest/involvement in Indigenous affairs, public sector policy and employment and race studies.

Matthew Mason

Dr Matthew Mason holds a PhD and Masters degree in Wind Engineering, and a Bachelors degree in Civil Engineering. Matt has worked as a researcher at universities in Australia, the USA and Japan where his main focus was on the modelling of severe wind storms and their interaction with the built environment.

Matthew has been involved with the redevelopment of Risk Frontiers' tropical cyclone loss model, CyclAus, and extensively involved with post-disaster damage assessments following recent earthquakes, tropical cyclones and flooding events in the region. In addition Matthew's interests lie in development and understanding of loss modelling techniques for meteorological hazards (severe local storms, tropical cyclones, east coast cyclones, flooding) and studying the role building codes and construction practice plays in ensuring structural integrity and community resilience.

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