Northern Territory Government
media release

**John Ah Kit**
MINISTER FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT
AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

21 January 2005

# GETTING IN THE SWIM FROM THE DESERT TO THE SEA

In the first round of the Pools in Remote Areas [PIRA] program, two Territory communities will be building swimming pools in the coming year. Yuendumu and Maningrida—respectively Tanami Desert and Arafura Sea communities. Under the joint Northern Territory-Federal Government sponsored PIRA program, the successful communities have submitted detailed business plans for pools that will have direct health, educational, employment and enterprise benefits for their people.

"This is a huge step forward for Yuendumu and Maningrida—and with communities contributing a third of construction costs—it is a unique approach to the provision of community facilities in remote communities," said Mr Ah Kit.

"This is not a hand out—each community has a demonstrated financial commitment, as well as detailed sustainability plans in place, backed up by strong local support.

"The Maningrida pool, for example, is backed by the Council, Progress Association, Bawinanga, the Police and Night Patrol, the Community Education Centre and School Council, and the local Health Board.

The $4.5 million PIRA program was jointly announced by NT Local Government Minister John Ah Kit and Federal Indigenous Affairs Minister Senator Amanda Vanstone in May 2004. With funds to be contributed by communities themselves, over $6 million will be spent in the next two years in the Territory on pool construction in remote areas.

"At the heart of PIRA is the educational, health, employment and enterprise benefits swimming pools will bring to communities.

"Both Yuendumu and Maningrida will be incorporating 'no school, no pool' regimes into place—strategies that have had demonstrable effects on school attendance," said Mr Ah Kit

"The availability of chlorinated pools also has significant health benefits, with documented reductions in skin, eye and ear infections—each of which currently have devastating effects on the health of our kids."

Mr Ah Kit said that a number of other communities were in the pipeline to have funding approved for pools.

"There's a lot of work getting well researched submissions together, and I congratulate the councils at Maningrida and Yuendumu on their strong commitment to building a sustainable community resource for their people."

***Contact: Chips Mackinolty 0419 844 774***

Note an announcement will be made soon with regard to a parallel health outcomes evaluation research program to be carried out in conjunction with new pool construction.

# *IAN THORPE CHAMPIONS POOLS PROGRAM*

Olympic Champion Ian Thorpe has offered his support for a new program to build pools in remote parts of the country to improve the health of all Australian children.

As the Northern Territory and Federal Governments jointly announced construction of the first two pools this year at Yuendumu and Manigrida, Ian Thorpe praised the move as a genuine health intervention that could rapidly improve some of the most serious health problems afflicting Indigenous children in these isolated areas.

"I would love to visit these communities when the pools open because this will be a great day, a milestone in health for Australian children," Ian Thorpe said in Sydney today.

"This will help reduce skin, eye and ear infections that contribute to far more serious illnesses cutting short the lives of too many Indigenous Australians," Thorpe said.

"In visiting some of the remote communities in the Northern Territory I have seen children with ear infections that produce hearing loss and skin infections that can contribute to acute rheumatic fever. Regular swimming in these 25 metre pools can definitely improve their health, "Thorpe said.

Ian Thorpe has joined the former Australian of the Year, Dr Fiona Stanley and former Sixty Minutes Reporter, Jeff McMullen, in efforts to raise national awareness of the promising health benefits of pools in remote areas.

Jeff McMullen, who is a director of Ian Thorpe¹s Fountain for Youth Trust, said the medical evidence gathered by Dr Stanley¹s health research team in Western Australia was stunning. McMullen said regular swimming produced a rapid reduction in *pyoderma* or skin sores, now linked to some of the world¹s highest rates of acute rheumatic fever which contributes to life threatening heart disease in adults. Middle ear infections and perforated ear drums are also reduced, helping to ease one of the most serious learning disabilities in young Aboriginal children.

Jeff McMullen said that the dream of building pools in country areas was first championed by the late Charles Perkins.

McMullen and Thorpe have urged Federal, State and Territory Governments to build more pools in the remote areas.

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# MEDIA RELEASE


## Senator the Hon Amanda Vanstone

Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs
Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Indigenous Affairs


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**Northern Territory pools – a practical outcome for government-community partnerships**

Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Senator Amanda Vanstone, said "The announcement of the construction of swimming pools in two Northern Territory Aboriginal communities – Maningrida and Yuendemu – is another example of the Government's shared responsibility approach at work!"

"Last year at the request of Northern Territory Minister Jack Ah Kit, the Australian Government was pleased to contributed $2.5 million, to the building of pools in partnership with the Northern Territory Government.," Senator Vanstone said.

The approach is based on an idea developed by Indigenous communities themselves. In addition to the contributions of our two governments, communities are also expected to contribute money. Under a 'no school, no pool' policy the community requires children to attend school if they wish to use the pool.

Senator Vanstone said that the Australian Government had extended its support for this approach by committing an additional $5 million during the Federal election to assist the development of similar arrangements in other States.

"The Australian Government is extremely pleased to be involved in a real partnership with the NT Government and local communities which will result in better health and school attendance."

"I congratulate the communities and all others involved and look forward to more communities coming on board in the future." Senator Vanstone said.


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