

MS MARIKA

CITATION FOR AN HONORARY DEGREE

Mr Chancellor, Ms Marika's early death has deprived Australia of one of its most distinguished Indigenous academics and public intellectuals. Ms Marika gained renown as a linguist and translator and as one of the leading theorists of bi-cultural or 'both-ways' education. She was the daughter of one of the leaders of the people of Yirrkala in their struggle to achieve landrights. She followed her father in playing a major role in the process of reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, being a Member of the Board of Reconciliation Australia and most recently a representative at the 2008, 20:20 summit.

A central theme of her life was communicating the richness of Yolngu culture and bodies of knowledge to the wider world and ensuring its value was recognised in both local and national educational programs. In 1976 while still at school, she worked on a grant from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander Studies (AIATSIS) recording interviews and songs in various Yolngu dialects, transcribing them and translating them into English. Subsequently, she became an exceptional linguistic and cultural translator, making significant contributions to ethnobotany, in the translation of Yolngu song-poetry and in the development of the Yolngu language and studies program at Charles Darwin University. In recent years, she worked closely with anthropologists at the Australian National University on Australian Research Council funded projects connected with the Saltwater Collection of the Australian National Maritime Museum (ANMM). The Living Knowledge website was completed shortly before her death. Designed for use in the New South Wales schools curriculum and by the ANMM, it will provide a rich insight into Yolngu environmental science. Her outstanding linguistic ability and her poetic sensibilities enabled her to translate Yolngu song poetry into English in such a way that the depth and expressive force of the original could be conveyed to English readers. Her expertise in Indigenous knowledge and education and her passion for research was recognised by her being elected as a Council Member of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.

Ms Marika's contribution to education in the Northern Territory has been outstanding. She spent many years as a teacher and linguist at Yirrkala Community Education centre. In addition to taking a leading role in the production of literature in the Yolngu language, she has helped to develop curricula that include Indigenous knowledge and history within the mainstream school program. She demonstrated in her own person how 'both ways' education could add value to a person's educational attainments and enable them to make a major contribution to cross-cultural understanding. She played a leading role in the development of the Garma Festival and Forum as a venue for introducing Aboriginal culture and systems of knowledge to wider audiences and engaging a global audience with crucial issues of Indigenous policy. She has recently played a leading role in the development of the Buku Larrngay Mulka Knowledge Centre in facilitating the digital repatriation of Yolngu cultural material from museums, archives and art galleries, and its use in community education and cultural activities. Her enthusiasm for digital technology and her recognition of its potential for improving Indigenous education was characteristic of her engagement with the contemporary world. However, this went hand in hand with her determination to show the continuing relevance of Yolngu knowledge and values to creating a richer and more encompassing future for Australia. In 2006, she was made the Northern Territorian of the Year for her work in lifting the educational standards of the Territory's Indigenous citizens.

Ms Marika will be remembered by all who knew her as a person of immense energy and enthusiasm for life and knowledge. She lived her life to the full and influenced people across the world. She could not slow down. She was a Yolngu intellectual who added to her own society's knowledge and helped spread that knowledge to the rest of the world, with a generosity of spirit that lies at the heart of reconciliation.

Mr Chancellor, it is my privilege to request that you confer posthumously on Ms Marika the degree of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*, on the ground of her distinguished creative contributions in the service of society.

Professor Ian Chubb AC
Vice-Chancellor
The Australian National University
30 May 2008